

MEDITATIONS AND READINGS
ST. ALPHONSUS LIGOURI

Volume I
Part I
Advent - Christmas - Epiphany

Part II
Epiphany - Septuagesima

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EXERCISES FOR THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH

First Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE DAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

That day is a day of wrath ... a day of calamity and misery. --

Soph: i. 15.

On the Last Day will be verified the prediction of St. John: *And they say to the mountains and to the rocks: Fall upon us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.* (Apoc. vi., 16).

Send forth O Lord, the Lamb, the Ruler of the earth Who by sacrificing Himself shall satisfy Thy justice for us, and so reign in the hearts of men. O Lamb of God, pardon me before the arrival of that day on which Thou shalt judge me.

I.

The Last Day is called in Scripture *a day of wrath and misery*; and such it will be for all those unhappy beings who have died in mortal sin; for on that day their most secret crimes will be made manifest to the whole world, and themselves separated from the company of the Saints, and condemned to the eternal prison of hell, where they will suffer all the agonies of ever dying yet always remaining alive. St. Jerome, in the Cave at Bethlehem, devoted to continual prayer and penance, trembled at the bare thought of the General Judgement. The Ven. Father Juvenal Ancina, hearing that *Sequence for the Dead* sung, *Dies ire, dies illa*, was so struck with the anticipation of Judgment that he left the world and embraced the Religious life.

O Jesus! what will become of me on that day? Shall I be placed on Thy right hand with the Elect, or on Thy left with the reprobate? I know that I have deserved to be placed on Thy left, but I know also that Thou wilt still pardon me if I repent of my sins: therefore do I repent of them with my whole heart, and am resolved rather to die than offend Thee any more.

II.

As this will be a day of calamity and terror for the reprobate, so will it be a day of joy and triumph for the Elect; for then, in the sight of all mankind, will the blessed souls of the Elect be proclaimed queens of Paradise and spouses of the Immaculate

Lamb.

O Jesus! Thy precious Blood is my hope. Remember not the offences that I have committed against Thee, and inflame my whole soul with Thy love. I love Thee, my sovereign Good, and I trust that in that day I shall be associated with those loving souls who will praise and love Thee for all eternity.

Choose, my soul; choose now either an eternal crown in that blessed kingdom, where God will be seen and loved face to face in the company of the Saints, of the Angels, and of Mary, the Mother of Jesus; or the prison of hell, where you must weep and lament for ever, abandoned by God and by all.

"O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!" O divine Lamb, Who, to deliver us from the pains of hell, wast pleased to sacrifice Thy divine life by a bitter death upon the Cross, have compassion on us; but more particularly upon me who have more than others offended Thee. I am sorry above every evil for having dishonoured Thee by my sins, but I hope on that day to honour Thee before men and Angels, by proclaiming Thy mercies towards me. O Jesus! help me to love Thee; I desire Thee alone. O Mary, holy Queen! protect me on that day. FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Spiritual Reading*

THE NATIONS IN THE VALLEY OF JOSAPHAT

St. Jerome spent his days in the Cave of Bethlehem in prayer and penance, and trembled at the thought of Jesus coming at the Last Day to judge the world.

At present God is not known and, therefore He is as much despised by sinners as if He could not avenge, whenever He pleases, the injuries offered to Him. The *wicked looketh upon the Almighty as if he could do nothing*. (Job, xxii., 17). But the Lord has fixed a day, called in the Scriptures, *the day of the Lord, Dies Domini*, on which the Eternal Judge will make known His power and majesty. *The Lord*, says the Psalmist, *shall be known when he exerciseth judgment*. (Ps. ix., 17). On this text St. Bernard writes: "The Lord, Who is now unknown while He seeks mercy, shall be known when He executes justice." The Prophet Sophonias calls the Day of the Lord *a day of wrath - a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery*. (Soph. i., 15).

This day shall commence with fire from the heavens which will burn the earth, all men then living, and all things upon the earth. *And the earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up.* (2 Pet. iii., 10). All shall become one heap of ashes.

After the death of all men, *the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again.* (1 Cor. xv., 52). St. Jerome used to say: "As often as I consider the Day of Judgment, I tremble. Whether I eat or drink, or whatever else I do, that terrible trumpet appears to sound in my ears, 'Arise ye dead, and come to judgment';" and St. Augustine declared, that nothing banished earthly thoughts from him so effectually as the fear of the Judgment.

At the sound of that trumpet the souls of the Blessed shall descend from Heaven to be united to the bodies with which they served God on earth; and the unhappy souls of the damned shall come up from hell to take possession again of those same bodies with which they offended God. Oh! how different the appearance of the former, compared with that of the latter! The damned will appear deformed and black, like so many firebrands of hell; but *the just shall shine as the sun.* (Matt. xiii., 43). Oh! how great will then be the happiness of those who have mortified their bodies by works of penance! We may estimate their felicity from the words addressed by St. Peter of Alcantara, after death, to St. Teresa: "O happy penance! which merited for me such glory!"

After the Resurrection they shall be summoned by the Angels to appear in the Valley of Josaphat. *Nations, nations in the valley of destruction, for the day of the Lord is near.* (Joel, iii., 14). Then the Angels shall come and separate the reprobate from the Elect, placing the latter on the right, and the former on the left. *The Angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just.* (Matt. xiii. 40). Oh! how great will then be the confusion which the unhappy damned shall suffer! This punishment alone, says St. Chrysostom, would be sufficient to constitute a hell for the wicked. Brother shall be separated from brother, husband from wife, son from father.

But, behold! the heavens are opened -- the Angels come to assist at the General Judgment, carrying, as St. Thomas says, the Standard of the Cross and the other instruments of the Passion

of the Redeemer. The same may be inferred from the Twenty-fourth Chapter of St. Matthew: *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.* (xxiv. 30). Sinners shall weep at the sight of the Cross; for, as St. Chrysostom says, the nails will complain of them -- the Wounds and the Cross of Jesus Christ will speak against them.

Most holy Mary, the Queen of Saints and Angels, shall come to assist at the Last Judgment; and lastly, the Eternal Judge shall appear in the clouds, full of splendour and majesty. *And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.* (Ib). Oh, how great shall be the agony of the reprobate at the sight of the Judge! *At their presence,* says the Prophet Joel, *the people shall be in grievous pains.* (Joel, ii). According to St. Jerome the presence of Jesus Christ will give the reprobate more pain than hell itself. "It would," he says, "be easier for the damned to bear the torments of hell than the presence of the Lord." Hence on that day, the wicked shall, according to St. John, call on the mountains to fall on them and to hide them from the sight of the Judge. *And they shall say to the mountains and the rocks: Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.* (Apoc. vi., 16).

*The Spiritual Reading should, if possible, be read at some quiet, convenient time on the particular day for which it has been selected.

Evening Meditation

THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN THE WORK OF THE REDEMPTION

I.

And He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost ... and was made man.

-- Nicene Creed.

Consider that God, having created the first man to serve Him and love Him in this life, and to be afterwards taken by Him to reign eternally with Him in Paradise, enriched him for this end with many lights and graces. But ungrateful man rebelled against God, refusing Him the obedience which he owed Him both in justice and gratitude; and thus he unhappily remained as a rebel, deprived, with all his posterity, of Divine grace, and for ever excluded from Paradise. Behold then, in

consequence of this ruin caused by sin, all mankind lost! All were spiritually blind, living in the midst of darkness and the shadow of death.

But God, seeing men reduced to this so miserable a condition, was moved to pity and resolved to save them. And how did He save them? He did not send an Angel, or a Seraph; but to show to the world the immense love that He bore to these ungrateful worms, *He sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.* (Rom. viii., 3). Yes, He sent His own Son to become Man, and to clothe Himself with the same flesh as that of sinful men, in order that He, by His sufferings and death, might satisfy Divine justice for their crimes, and thus deliver them from eternal death, and reconciling them to His Divine Father, obtain for them Divine grace, and render them worthy to enter the eternal kingdom of Heaven.

But how is it, my Jesus, that after Thou hadst repaired this ruin of sin by Thy death, I have so often wilfully renewed it again by the many offences I have committed against Thee? Thou didst save me at so great a cost, and I have so often chosen to lose myself by losing Thee, O infinite Good! But Thy words give me confidence, for Thou hast said that when the sinner who has turned his back upon Thee is afterwards converted to Thee, Thou dost not refuse to embrace him: *Turn ye to me and I will turn to you.* (Zach. i., 3). And Thou hast likewise said: *If any man ... open to me the door, I will come in to him.* (Apoc. iii., 20). Behold, O Lord, I am one of these rebels, an ungrateful traitor, who have often turned my back upon Thee, and driven Thee from my soul; but now I repent with all my heart for having thus ill-treated Thee and despised Thy grace; I repent of it, and I love Thee above every thing. Behold, the door of my heart is now open, enter Thou in, but enter never to leave it again. I well know that Thou wilt never leave me, if I do not again drive Thee away; but this is my fear, and this is the grace which I ask of Thee, and which I hope always to ask: let me die rather than be guilty of this fresh and greater ingratitude.

II.

Here pause to consider, on the one hand, the immense ruin that sin brings upon souls, since it deprives them of the friend-

ship of God, and of Paradise, and condemns them to an eternity of torments. And consider, on the other hand, the infinite love which God showed in this great work of the Incarnation of the Word, causing this His only begotten Son to come and sacrifice His Divine life by the hands of executioners, in a sea of pain and infamy, to obtain for us pardon and eternal salvation. Oh, when we contemplate this great mystery and this excess of Divine love, each one of us should do nothing but exclaim: O infinite Goodness! O infinite Mercy! O infinite love! That a God should become Man and die for me!

My dearest Redeemer, I do not deserve to love Thee, after all the offences I have committed against Thee; but I ask of Thee through Thy merits, the gift of Thy holy love. Therefore, make me know the great good Thou art, the love Thou hast borne me, and how much Thou hast done to oblige me to love Thee. Ah, my God and my Saviour, let me no longer live ungrateful to Thy great goodness. My Jesus, I will never leave Thee again; I have offended Thee enough already. It is but right that I should spend the remaining years of my life in loving Thee and pleasing Thee. My Jesus, my Jesus, help me; help a sinner who desires to love Thee. O Mary my Mother, thou hast all power with Jesus, for thou art His Mother. Tell Him to pardon me; tell Him to enchain me with His holy love. Thou art my hope, in thee do I trust.

Monday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

GOD DISHONoured BY SIN

Previous to the coming of our Redeemer, the whole unhappy race of mankind groaned in misery upon this earth: all were children of wrath, nor was there one who could appease God, justly indignant at their sins. O God of Mercy, lest Thy Divine Wisdom might reproach us with our offences against Thee, Thou hast hidden under an infant's form! Thou hast concealed Thy Justice under the most profound abasement that it might not condemn us!

I.

Consider how sin dishonours God. *By transgression of the law*

thou dishonourest God (Rom. ii., 23), says St. Paul. When the sinner deliberates whether he shall give or refuse his consent to sin, he takes the balance into his hands to decide which is of greater value -- the favour of God, or some passion, some worldly interest or pleasure. When he yields to temptation, what does he do? He decides that some wretched gratification is more desirable than the favour of God. Thus it is that he dishonours God, declaring, by his consent, that a miserable pleasure is preferable to the Divine friendship. Thus, then, O God, have I so many times dishonoured Thee, by esteeming Thee less than my miserable passions!

Of this the Almighty complains by the Prophet Ezechiel, when He says: *They violated me among my people for a handful of barley and a piece of bread.* (Ezech. xiii., 19). If the sinner should exchange God for a treasure of jewels, or for a kingdom, it would indeed be doing a great evil, because God is of infinitely more value than all the treasures and kingdoms of the earth. But for what do so many exchange Him? For a vapour, for a little dirt, for a poisoned pleasure, which is no sooner tasted than it is fled. O God, how could I have had the heart, for such vile things, so often to despise Thee, Who hast shown so much love for me! But behold, my Redeemer, how I now love Thee above all things; and because I love Thee, I feel more regret for having lost Thee, my God, than if I had lost all my other goods, and even my life. Have pity on me, and forgive me, I will never more incur Thy displeasure. Grant that I may rather die than offend Thee any more.

II.

Lord, who is like to thee? (Ps. xxxiv., 10).

And what good things, O God, can be comparable to Thee, O infinite Goodness? And how could I have turned my back upon Thee, to give myself to those vile things which sin held out to me? *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou hast gone backward.* (Jer. xv., 6). God complains and says: Ungrateful soul, thou hast forsaken Me! I would never have forsaken thee hadst not thou 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 shall stand to be judged before the divine

tribunal! O Jesus, Thy precious Blood is my hope. Thou hast promised to hear him who prays to Thee. I ask Thee not for the goods of this world; I ask Thee for the pardon of the sins I have committed against Thee, and for which I am sorry above every other evil. I ask Thee for perseverance in Thy grace until the end of my life. I ask Thee for the gift of Thy holy love; my soul is enamoured of Thy goodness: hear me, O Lord. Only grant that I may love Thee both here and hereafter, and as to all things else, do with me as Thou pleasest. My Lord and my only Good, suffer me not to be any more separated from Thee! Mary, Mother of God, do thou also listen to me, and obtain for me that I may ever belong to God, and that God may be my inheritance for ever.

Spiritual Reading

THE JUDGMENT AND THE SENTENCE

The judgment sat and the books were opened. (Dan. vii., 10). The books of conscience are opened, and the Judgment commences. The Apostle says, that the Lord *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.* (1 Cor. iv., 5). And, by the mouth of His Prophet, Jesus Christ has said: *I will search Jerusalem with lamps.* (Soph. i., 12). The light of the lamp reveals all that is hidden.

"A judgment," says St. Chrysostom, "terrible to sinners, but desirable and sweet to the just." The Last Judgment will fill sinners with terror, but will be a source of joy and sweetness to the elect; for God will then give praise to each one according to his works. The Apostle tells us that on that day the just will be raised above the clouds to be united to the Angels, and to increase the number of those who pay homage to the Lord. *We shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air.* (1 Thess. iv., 16).

Worldlings now regard as fools the Saints who led mortified and humble lives; but then they shall confess their own folly, and say: *We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.* (Wis. v., 4). In this world, the rich and the noble are called happy; but true happiness consists in a life of sanctity. Rejoice, ye souls who live in tribulation; *your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* (Jo. xvi., 20). In the valley of Josaphat you shall

be seated on thrones of glory.

But the reprobate, like goats destined for the slaughter, shall be placed on the left to await their last condemnation. On the Day of Judgment there is no hope of mercy for poor sinners. The greatest punishment of sin for those who live in enmity with God is to lose the fear and remembrance of the divine judgment. Continue, continue, says the Apostle, to live obstinately in sin; but in proportion to your obstinacy, you shall have accumulated for the Day of Judgment a treasure of the wrath of God. *But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath.* (Rom. ii., 5).

Then sinners will not be able to hide themselves; but, with insufferable pain, they will be compelled to appear in judgment. "To lie hid," says St. Anselm, "will be impossible -- to appear will be intolerable." The devils will perform their office as accusers, and, as St. Augustine says, will say to the Judge: *Most just God, declare him to be ours, who was unwilling to be yours.* The witnesses against the wicked shall be: first, their own conscience -- *Their conscience bearing witness to them* (Ib. ii., 15); secondly, the very walls of the house in which they sinned shall cry out against them -- *The stone shall cry out of the wall* (Hab. ii., 11); thirdly, the Judge Himself will say -- *I am the judge and the witness* (Jer. xxix., 23). Hence, according to Saint Augustine, "He who is now the witness of your life shall be the judge of your cause." To Christians particularly He will say: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes.* (Matt. xi., 21). Christians, He will say, if the graces which I have bestowed on you had been given to the Turks or to the Pagans, they would have done penance for their sins; but you have ceased to sin only with your death. He shall then manifest to all men their most hidden crimes. *I will discover thy shame to thy face.* (Nah. iii., 5). He shall expose to view all their secret impurities, injustices and cruelties. *I will set all thy abominations against thee.* (Ezech. vii., 3). Each of the damned shall carry his sins written on his forehead.

What excuses can save the wicked on that day? Ah! they can offer no excuses. *All iniquity shall stop her mouth.* (Ps. cvi., 42).

Their very sins will close the mouth of the reprobate, so that they will not have courage to excuse themselves. They shall pronounce their own condemnation.

The Sentence of the Judge

Jesus Christ, then, will first turn to the Elect, and with a serene countenance will say: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* (Matt. xxv., 34). He will then bless all the tears shed through sorrow for their sins, and all their good works, their prayers, mortifications, and communions; above all, He will bless for them the pains of His Passion and the Blood shed for their salvation. And, after these benedictions, the Elect, singing Alleluias, shall enter Paradise to praise and love God for all eternity.

The Judge shall then turn to the reprobate, and pronounce their condemnation in these words: *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.* (Ib. 41). They shall then be forever accursed, separated from God, and sent to burn for ever in the fire of hell. *And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just into life everlasting.* (Ib. 46).

After this Sentence, the wicked shall, according to St. Ephrem, be compelled to take leave for ever of their relatives, of Paradise, of the Saints, and of Mary the divine Mother. "Farewell, ye just! Farewell, O Cross! Farewell, O Paradise! Farewell, fathers and brothers: we shall never see you again! Farewell, O Mary, Mother of God!" Then a great pit shall open in the middle of the valley: the unhappy damned shall be cast into it, and shall see those gates shut which shall never again be opened. O accursed sin! to what a miserable end will you one day conduct so many souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ. O unhappy souls! for whom is prepared such a melancholy end. But let us have confidence, for Jesus Christ is now a Father, and not a Judge. He is ready to pardon all who repent. *For us men and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven and was made man.*

Evening Meditation

JESUS CHARGED WITH THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

I.

He shall bear their iniquities. (Is., liii., 11).

Consider that the Divine Word, in becoming Man, chose not only to take the form of a sinner, but also to bear all the sins of men, and to satisfy for them as if they were His own: *He shall bear their iniquities*. Cornelius a Lapide adds: "as if He had committed them Himself." Let us here reflect what an oppression and anguish the Heart of the Infant Jesus must have felt, Who had already charged Himself with the sins of the whole world, in finding that Divine Justice insisted on His making a full satisfaction for them.

Well did Our Lord know the malice of every sin, for, through the divine light which accompanied Him, He knew immeasurably more than all men and Angels the infinite goodness of His Father, and how infinitely deserving He is of being revered and loved. And then He saw drawn up in array before Him a countless number of transgressions which would be committed by men and for which He was to suffer and die.

My beloved Jesus, I, who have offended Thee, am not worthy of Thy favours, but through the merit of that pain which Thou didst suffer, and which Thou didst offer up to God at the sight of my sins, and to satisfy divine justice for them, give me a share in that light by which Thou didst see their malice, and in that hatred with which Thou didst then abominate them. O Lord! Thou hast indeed died to save me; but Thy death will not save me if I do not, on my part, detest every evil, and have true sorrow for the sins I have committed against Thee. But even this sorrow must be given me by Thee. Thou givest it to him that asks it of Thee. I ask it of Thee through the merits of all the sufferings Thou didst endure on this earth; give me sorrow for my sins, but a sorrow that will correspond to my transgressions.

II.

Our Lord once showed St. Catherine of Siena the hideousness of one single venial sin; and such was the dread and sorrow of the Saint that she fell senseless to the ground. What, then, must have been the sufferings of the Infant Jesus when, on His entrance into the world, He saw before Him the immense array of all the crimes of men for which He was to make satisfaction!

And then He knew in particular every sin of each one of us: "He had regard to every particular sin," says St. Bernardine of

Siena. And Cardinal Hugo says that the executioners "caused Him exterior pain by crucifying Him, but we interior pain by sinning against Him." He means that each one of our sins afflicted the soul of Jesus Christ more than crucifixion and death afflicted His body. Such is the beautiful recompense which has been rendered to our Divine Saviour for His love by everyone who remembers to have offended Him by mortal sin!

O Eternal God, supreme and infinite Good! I, a miserable worm, have dared to lose respect for Thee, and to despise Thy grace; I detest above every evil and abhor the injustice I have committed against Thee; I repent of all with my whole heart, not so much on account of hell, which I have deserved, as because I have offended Thy infinite Goodness. I hope for pardon from Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ; and I hope also to obtain, together with Thy pardon, the grace of loving Thee. I love Thee, O God, Who art worthy of infinite love, and I will always repeat to Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee! And as Thy beloved St. Catherine of Genoa said to Thee, while she stood in spirit at the foot of Thy crucified Image, so will I also say to Thee now that I am standing at Thy feet: "My Lord, no more sins, no more sins!" No, for Thou indeed dost not deserve to be offended, O my Jesus, but Thou only deservest to be loved. My Blessed Redeemer, help me. My Mother Mary, assist me, I pray thee; I only ask of thee to obtain for me that I may love God during the time that is left me in this life.

Tuesday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE GREAT AFFAIR OF SALVATION

Consider that our most important affair is that of our eternal salvation. Upon our eternity depends our happiness or misery for ever. Whether we shall live for ever happy or for ever miserable.

Before man is life and death ... that which he shall choose shall be given him. (Ecclus. xv., 18).

Oh, let us make such a choice now as we shall not have to regret in eternity.

I.

The affair of our eternal salvation is of all affairs the most important. But how comes it that men use all diligence to succeed in the affairs of this world, leave no means untried to obtain a desirable situation, to gain a lawsuit, or to bring about a marriage; reject no counsels, neglect no measures by which to secure their object; neither eat nor sleep, and yet do nothing to gain eternal salvation -- nothing to gain it, but everything to forfeit it, as though *Hell, Heaven, and Eternity* were not Articles of Faith, but only fables and lies?

O God! assist me by Thy divine light; suffer me not to be any longer blinded, as I hitherto have been.

If an accident happen to a house, what is not immediately done to repair it? If a jewel be lost, what is not done to recover it? The soul is lost, the grace of God is lost, and men sleep and laugh! We attend most carefully to our temporal welfare, and almost entirely neglect our eternal salvation! We call those happy who have renounced all things for God; why then are we so much attached to earthly things?

O Jesus! Thou hast so much desired my salvation as to shed Thy Blood and lay down Thy life to secure it; and I have been so indifferent to the preservation of Thy grace as to renounce and forfeit it for a mere nothing! I am sorry, O Lord, for having thus dishonoured Thee. I will renounce all things to attend only to Thy love, my God, Who art most worthy of all love.

II.

The Son of God gives His life to save our souls; the devil is most diligent in his endeavours to bring them to eternal ruin: and what care do we take of them? St. Philip Neri convicts that man of the height of folly who is inattentive to the salvation of his soul. Let us rouse our Faith: it is certain that, after this short life, another life awaits us, which will be either eternally happy or eternally miserable. God has given us to choose which we will. *Before man is life and death ... that which he shall choose shall be given him.* Ah! let us make such a choice now as we shall not have to repent of for all eternity.

O God, make me sensible of the great wrong I have done Thee in offending Thee and renouncing Thee for the love of creatures. I am sorry with my whole heart for having despised

Thee, my sovereign Good; do not reject me now that I return to Thee. I love Thee above all things, and for the future I will renounce all things rather than lose Thy grace. Through the love which Thou hast shown me in dying for me, succour me with Thy help, and do not abandon me. O Mary, Mother of God, be thou my advocate.

Spiritual Reading

MENTAL PRAYER

I. ITS IMPORTANCE

In the first place, Mental Prayer is necessary in order that we may have light on the journey we are making towards eternity. The Eternal Truths are spiritual things which are not seen with the eyes of the body, but only in the mind by consideration. He that does not meditate does not see them; therefore he walks with difficulty on the way of Salvation. And further, he who does not meditate does not know his defects, and therefore, says St. Bernard, does not detest them. So also, he does not see the danger to Salvation in which he is, and therefore does not think of avoiding it. God enlightens us in Meditation. *Come ye to him and be enlightened.* (Ps. xxxiii., 6). In Meditation God speaks to us and makes us know what we are to avoid and what we are to do. *I will lead her into solitude and I will speak to her heart.* (Osee, ii., 14). St. Bernard says that Meditation regulates our affections, directs our actions and corrects our defects.

In the second place, without Mental Prayer we have no strength to resist temptation and practise virtue. St. Teresa used to say that when a man leaves off Mental Prayer, the devil has no need of carrying him to hell, for he throws himself into it of his own accord. And the reason is, that without Meditation there is no prayer. God is most willing to give us His graces; but St. Gregory says that before giving them He desires to be asked, and, as it were, compelled to give them through our prayers. But without Meditation there is no light: we walk in darkness, and walking in darkness, we do not see the danger we are in, we do not make use of the means to avoid it, or pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Cardinal Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian who does not meditate to persevere in the grace of God: whereas he who makes his Meditation every

day can scarcely fall into sin -- and if unhappily he should fall occasionally, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God that "Mental Prayer and mortal sin cannot exist together."

And further, Meditation is the blessed furnace in which souls are inflamed with divine love. *In my meditation*, says the Psalmist, *a fire shall flame out* (Ps. xxviii., 4). St. Catherine of Bologna said: "Meditation is that bond which binds the soul to God." In Meditation the soul, retiring to converse alone with God, is raised above itself. *He shall sit solitary and hold his peace* (Lam. ii., 28), says the Prophet Jeremias. When the soul sits solitary, that is, remains alone in Meditation to consider how worthy God is of love, and how great is the love He bears to it, it will then relish the sweetness of God and fill its mind with holy thoughts. There it will detach itself from earthly affections; there it will conceive great desires to become holy, and finally resolve to give itself wholly to God. And where have the Saints made those generous resolutions which have lifted them up to a sublime degree of perfection, if not in Mental Prayer? St. Aloysius Gonzaga used to say that no one will ever attain a high degree of perfection who is not given to much Mental Prayer.

Let us; then, devote ourselves to it, and not neglect it on account of any weariness that we may experience: the weariness which we endure for God will be abundantly recompensed by Him.

Resolve, then, to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening -- but it is better in the morning -- half an hour's Meditation. In tomorrow's "Spiritual Reading" you will see briefly explained an easy method of making this Prayer. For the rest it is sufficient that during the time you should recollect yourself by reading some book of Meditation -- either this one or one of the many others -- and from time to time excite some good affection or some aspiration as will be explained in the Method. Above all I beg you never to leave off Mental Prayer, which you should practise at least once a day, although you may be in great aridity and feel great weariness in performing it. *If you do not discontinue it you will certainly be saved.*

Evening Meditation

THE LOVE OF GOD FOR MEN

I.

God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son. (St. John iii., 16).

Consider that the Eternal Father, in giving us His Son for a Redeemer, the victim and price of our ransom, could not give us stronger motives for hope and love, to inspire us with confidence, and to oblige us to love Him. "In giving us His Son," says St. Augustine, "He could give us nothing more." He desires that we should avail ourselves of this immense Gift in order to gain for ourselves eternal Salvation, and every grace that we want; for in Jesus we find all that we can desire; we find light, strength, peace, confidence, love, and eternal glory; for Jesus Christ is a Gift which contains all the gifts that we can seek for or desire. *How hath he not also, with him, given us all things?* (Rom. vii., 32). God having given us His beloved only begotten Son, Who is the fountain and treasure of all good, who could fear that He would deny us any favour that we ask of Him?

O Eternal God! who could ever have given us this treasure of infinite value, but Thou, Who art a God of infinite love? O my Creator, what more couldst Thou have done to give us confidence in Thy mercy, and to put us under an obligation of loving Thee? O Lord, I have repaid Thee with ingratitude; but Thou hast said: *To them that love God all things work together unto good* (Rom. viii., 28). Therefore, notwithstanding the great number and the enormity of my sins, I will not despair of Thy bounty; rather let my transgressions serve to humble me the more whenever I meet with any insult; insults and humiliations does he indeed deserve who has had the temerity to offend Thy divine Majesty. I wish that my sins may serve to reconcile me more to the crosses which Thou shalt send me, that I may be more diligent in serving and honouring Thee in order to compensate for the injuries I have committed against Thee. O my God, I will always remember the displeasure I have caused Thee in order that I may the more exalt Thy mercy and be inflamed with love for Thee.

II.

Christ Jesus is of God made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption. (1 Cor. i., 30). God hath given Jesus to us in order that He might be to us ignorant and blind creatures light and wisdom, wherewith to walk in the way of salvation; in order that to us who are deserving of hell He might be justice, enabling us to aspire to Paradise; that to us sinners He might be sanctification, to obtain for us holiness; that finally, to us slaves of the devil He might be a ransom to purchase for us the liberty of the sons of God. In short, the Apostle says that with Jesus Christ we have been enriched with every good gift and every grace, if we ask it through His merits: *In all things you are made rich in him ... so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace.* (1 Cor. i., 5).

And this gift which God has made us of His Son is a gift to each one of us; for He hath given Him entirely to each of us, as if He had given Him to each one alone, so that every one of us may say: Jesus is all mine; His body is mine; His blood is mine; His life is mine; His sorrows, His death, His merits, are all mine. Wherefore St. Paul said: *He loved me and delivered himself for me.* (Gal. ii., 20). And every one may say the same thing: "My Redeemer has loved me; and for the love that He bore me He has given Himself entirely to me."

My God, my God, how can I ever leave off loving Thee and separate myself again from Thy love! I repent, and will always repent of the outrages I have committed against Thee; I depend upon Thee to help me. O my God, for Thy Glory's sake, vouchsafe to grant that, as I have offended Thee much I may also love Thee much!

O Mary, my Queen, do thou assist me. Thou knowest my weakness. Grant that I may have recourse to thee whenever the devil tries to separate me from God. My Mother, my hope, do thou help me. Amen.

Wednesday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE GREAT THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

Man shall go into the house of his eternity. (Eccles. xii, 5).

He who builds a house for himself takes great pains to make it commodious, airy and handsome, and says: "I labour and give

myself a great deal of trouble about this house, because I shall have to live in it all my life." And yet how little is the *House of Eternity* thought of!

I.

Thus did St. Augustine designate the thought of eternity: "The Great Thought" -- *Magna Cogitatio*. It was this thought that induced so many solitaries to retire into deserts; so many Religious, even kings and queens, to shut themselves up in cloisters; and so many Martyrs to sacrifice their lives in the midst of torments, in order to acquire a happy eternity in Heaven, and to avoid a miserable eternity in hell. The Blessed John of Avila converted a certain lady with these two words: "Reflect," said he to her, "on these two words: *Ever* and *Never*." A certain monk went down into a grave that he might meditate continually on Eternity, and constantly repeated, "O Eternity! Eternity!"

How frequently, my God, have I deserved the eternity of hell! Oh, that I had never offended Thee! Grant me sorrow for my sins; have compassion on me.

The same Blessed John of Avila says, that he who believes in eternity and becomes not a Saint should be confined as one deranged. When we shall have arrived at eternity there will be no question of our residing in a house more or less commodious, or more or less airy: the question will be of our dwelling in a palace over-flowing with delights, or in a gulf of endless torments. And for how long a time? Not for forty or fifty years, but forever, as long as God shall be God. The Saints, to obtain salvation, thought it little to give their whole life to prayer, penance, and the practice of good works. And what do we do for the same end?

O my God! many years of my life are already past; already death is near at hand, and what have I hitherto done for Thee? Give me light, and strength, to devote the remainder of my days to Thy service. Too much, alas! have I offended Thee; I desire henceforth to love Thee.

II.

With fear and trembling work out thy salvation (Phil. ii, 12).

To obtain salvation we must tremble at the thought of being lost, and tremble not so much at the thought of hell, as of

sin, which alone can send us thither. He who dreads sin avoids dangerous occasions, frequently recommends himself to God, and has recourse to the means of keeping himself in the state of grace. He who acts thus will be saved; but for him who lives not in this manner it is morally impossible to be saved. Let us attend to that saying of St. Bernard: "We cannot be too secure where Eternity is at stake."

Thy Blood, O Jesus, my Redeemer, is my security. I should have been already lost on account of my sins, hadst Thou not offered me Thy pardon, on condition of my repentance for having offended Thee. I am sorry therefore, with my whole heart, for having offended Thee, Who art infinite Goodness. I love Thee, O sovereign Good, above every other good. I know that Thou wilt my salvation and I will endeavour to secure it by loving Thee forever. O Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

MENTAL PRAYER

II. ITS END AND OBJECT

In order to practise Mental Prayer, or Meditation, well, and to make it truly profitable to the soul, we must clearly ascertain the ends for which we make it.

1. *We must meditate in order to unite ourselves more completely to God.* It is not so much good thoughts in the intelligence, as good acts of the will, or holy desires, that unite us to God; and such are the acts that we perform in Meditation, acts of humility, of confidence, self-sacrifice, resignation, and especially of love and of repentance for our sins. "Acts of love," says St. Teresa, "are those that keep the soul inflamed with holy love."

2. *We must meditate in order to obtain from God, by prayer, the graces that are necessary in order to enable us to advance on the way of salvation, to avoid sin, and to take the means that will lead us to perfection.* The best fruit, then, that comes from Meditation is the exercise of prayer. Almighty God, ordinarily speaking, does not give grace to any but to those who pray. St. Gregory writes: "God desires to be entreated, He desires to be constrained, He desires to be, as it were, conquered by importunity." At times, in order to obtain graces of special value, it is not enough simply to pray; we must pray urgently, and, as it were, compel God, by our

prayers, to give them. It is true that at all times the Lord is ready to hear us; but at the time of Meditation, when we are most truly in converse with God, He is most bountiful in giving us His aid.

Above all, we must apply ourselves to Meditation, in order to obtain perseverance and the holy love of God. Final perseverance is not a single grace, but a chain of graces, to which must correspond the chain of our prayers; if we cease to pray, God will cease to give us His help, and we shall perish. He who does not practise Meditation will find the greatest difficulty in persevering in grace till death. Palafox, in his *Notes* on St. Teresa's Letters writes thus: "How will the Lord give us perseverance if we do not ask it? And how shall we ask for it without Meditation? Without Meditation there is no communion with God."

Thus must we be urgent in prayer to obtain from God His holy love. St. Francis de Sales said that all virtues come in union with holy love. *All good things came to me together with her.* (Wis. vii, 7). Let our prayer for perseverance and love, therefore, be continual; and, in order to pray with greater confidence, let us ever bear in mind the promise made us by Jesus Christ, that whatever we seek from God through the merits of His Son, He will give us. Let us, then, pray, and pray always, if we would that God make us abound in every blessing. Let us pray for ourselves, and, if we have zeal for the glory of God, let us pray for others. God is most pleased to be entreated for unbelievers and heretics and all sinners. *Let the people confess to thee, O God! let all the people confess to thee.* (Ps. lxxvi, 6). Let us say: O Lord! make them know Thee, make them love Thee. We read in the Lives of St. Teresa and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi how God inspired these holy women to pray for sinners. And to prayers for sinners let us also add prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

3. *We must apply ourselves to Meditation, not for the sake of spiritual consolations, but chiefly in order to learn what is the will of God concerning us.* *Speak, Lord,* said Samuel to God, *for thy servant heareth.* (1 Kings iii, 9). Lord, make me know what Thou wilt, that I may do it. Some persons continue Meditation as long as consolations continue; but when these cease, they leave off Meditation. It is true that God is accustomed to comfort His beloved souls at the time of Meditation, and to give them some foretaste

of the delights He prepares in Heaven for those who love Him. These are things which lovers of the world do not comprehend; they who have no taste except for earthly delights despise those that are celestial. Oh, if they were wise, how surely would they leave such pleasures to recollect themselves and speak alone with God! Meditation is nothing more than converse between the soul and God; the soul pours forth to Him its affections, its desires, its fears, its requests; and God speaks to the heart, causing it to know His goodness, and the love which He bears it, and what it must do to please Him. *I will lead her into solitude and speak to her heart.* (Osee, ii, 14).

But these delights are not constant, and, for the most part, holy souls experience much dryness of spirit in Meditation. "With dryness and temptations," says St. Teresa, "the Lord makes proof of those who love Him." And she adds: "Even if this dryness lasts through life, let not the soul leave off Meditation; the time will come when all will be well rewarded." The time of dryness is the time for gaining the greatest rewards; and when we find ourselves apparently without fervour, without good desires, and, as it were, unable to do a good act, let us humble ourselves and resign ourselves, for this very Meditation will be more fruitful than others. It is enough then to say, if we can say nothing more: "O Lord! help me, have mercy on me, abandon me not!" Happy he, who does not leave off Meditation in the hour of desolation. God will make him abound in graces.

Evening Meditation

THE WORD WAS MADE MAN IN THE FULNESS OF TIME.

I.

When the fulness of time was come God sent his Son. (Gal. iv, 4).

Consider that God allowed four thousand years to pass, after the transgression of Adam, before He sent His Son upon earth to redeem the world. And in the meantime, oh, what fatal darkness reigned upon the earth! The true God was not known or adored, except in one small corner of the world. Idolatry reigned everywhere; so that devils and stones and beasts were adored as gods.

But let us admire in this the Divine Wisdom: He deferred the coming of the Redeemer in order to render His advent more

welcome to man, in order that the malice of sin might be better known, as well as the necessity of a remedy and the grace of the Saviour. If Jesus Christ had come into the world immediately after the fall of Adam, the greatness of this favour would have been but slightly appreciated. Let us therefore thank the goodness of God for having sent us into the world after the great work of Redemption had been accomplished. Behold, the happy time is come which was called the fulness of time: *When the fulness of time was come, God sent his Son... that he might redeem them that were under the law.* (Gal. iv, 4).

O Divine Word, become Man for me, though I behold Thee thus humbled and become a little Infant in the womb of Mary, yet I confess and acknowledge Thee for my Lord and King, but a King of Love. My dearest Saviour, since Thou hast come down upon earth and clothed Thyself with our miserable flesh, in order to reign over our hearts, I beseech Thee come and establish Thy reign in my heart also, which was once, alas, ruled over by Thine enemies, but is now, I hope, Thine, as I desire that it may be always Thine, and that from this day forth Thou mayst be its only Lord: *Rule thou in the midst of thy enemies.* (Ps. cix, 2). Other kings reign by the strength of arms, but Thou comest to reign by the power of Thy love; and therefore Thou dost not come with regal pomp, or clothed in purple and gold, or adorned with sceptre and crown, or surrounded by armies of soldiers. Thou comest into the world to be born in a stable -- poor, forsaken, placed in a manger on a little straw, because thus Thou wouldst begin to reign in our hearts.

II.

It is called *fulness*, on account of the fulness of grace which the Son of God came to communicate to men by the Redemption of the world. Behold the Angel who is sent as ambassador into the town of Nazareth to announce to the Virgin Mary the coming of the Word, Who desires to become incarnate in her womb. The Angel salutes her, calls her *full of grace and blessed among women.* (Luke, i, 28). The humble Virgin, chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, is troubled at these praises on account of her great humility: but the Angel encourages her, and tells her that she has *found grace* with God; that is to say,

that grace which brought peace between God and man, and the reparation of the ruin caused by sin. He then tells her that she must give her Son the Name of Saviour: *Thou shalt call his name Jesus* (Ib. 31), and that this her Son is the very Son of God, Who is to redeem the world, and thus to reign over the hearts of men. Behold, at last Mary consents to be the Mother of such a Son: *Be it done unto me according to thy word.* (Ib. 38). And the Eternal Word takes flesh and becomes Man: *And the Word was made flesh.* (Jo. i, 14).

Let us thank this Son, and let us also thank His Mother, who, in consenting to be the Mother of such a Son, consented also to be the Mother of our salvation, and the Mother of sorrows, accepting at that time the martyrdom of sorrow that it would cost her to be the Mother of a Son Who was to come into the world to suffer and die for man.

Ah, my Infant King, how could I have so often rebelled against Thee, and lived so long Thy enemy, deprived of Thy grace, when, to oblige me to love Thee, Thou hast put off Thy divine majesty, and hast humbled Thyself even to appearing, first, as a Babe in a cave; then as a servant in a shop, and as a criminal on the Cross? Oh, happy me, if, now that I have been freed, as I hope, from the slavery of Satan, I allow myself forever to be governed by Thee and by Thy love! O Jesus, my King, Who art so amiable and so loving to our souls, take possession, I pray Thee, of mine; I give it entirely to Thee; accept it, that it may serve Thee forever, but serve Thee only for love. Thy majesty deserves to be feared, but Thy goodness still more deserves to be loved. Thou art my King, and shalt be always the only object of my love; and the only fear I have is the fear of displeasing Thee. That is what I hope. Do Thou help me with Thy grace. O Mary, my dear Lady! it is for thee to obtain for me that I may be faithful to this beloved King of my soul.

Thursday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

*PORTRAIT OF A MAN WHO IS BUT A SHORT TIME
GONE INTO THE HOUSE OF HIS ETERNITY.*

Under thee shall the moth be strewed and worms shall be thy cover-

ing. (Is. xiv, 11).

The moment the soul leaves the body it shall go into eternity and the body shall return to dust. The same lot awaits all, nobleman and peasant, prince and vassal. *Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall return to their dust.* (Ps. ciii, 29).

O my God, I will no longer resist Thy calls.

I.

Consider that thou art dust and that thou shalt return to dust. A day will come when thou shalt die and rot in a grave where *worms shall be thy covering.*

Imagine that thou beholdest a person who has just died. Look at that body lying on the bed, the head fallen on the chest, the hair in disorder and still bathed in the sweat of death, the eyes sunk, the cheeks hollow, the face the colour of ashes, the lips and tongue like iron, the body cold and heavy. The beholders grow pale and tremble. How many at the sight of a deceased relative or friend have changed their lives and retired from the world!

Still greater horror will be excited when the body begins to putrify. Twenty-four hours have not elapsed since the death of that young man, and his body already sends forth an offensive smell. The windows must be opened, and to prevent the communication of disease to the entire family, he must soon be transferred to the church and buried in the earth. "If he has been one of the rich and noble of the world, his body shall send forth a more intolerable stench," says St. Ambrose.

Behold the end of that proud, that lewd, voluptuous man! Before his death, desired and sought after in conversation, and now become an object of horror and disgust to all who behold him! His relatives are in haste to remove him from the house. They hire men to shut him up in a coffin and carry him to the churchyard and throw him into a grave!

O Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee for not having taken me out of life when I was Thy enemy. For how many years have I deserved to be in hell! Had I died on such a day or such a night, what would be my lot for all eternity? Lord, I thank Thee! I accept my death in satisfaction for my sins and I accept it in the manner in which Thou wilt be pleased to send it. But since

Thou hast borne with me till now, wait for me a little longer. *Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little.* (Job x, 20). Give me time to bewail my offences before Thou dost judge me. I will no longer resist Thy calls. Who knows but the words I have just read may be the last call for me! Behold the penitent traitor who has recourse to Thee. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* (Ps. l, 19).

II.

Consider that as thou hast acted on the occasion of the death of friends and relatives so others will act on the occasion of thy death. During life, the fame of his wit, of his politeness, of the elegance of his manners and his facetiousness, was spread far and wide, but after death the dead man is soon forgotten. On hearing the news of his death some say: "He was an honour to his family;" "He has provided well for his children." Some regret his death because he had done them some service during life; others rejoice at it because it is an advantage to them. But in a little time no one speaks of him. In the beginning the relatives are afflicted for a short time, but soon they feel unwilling to hear his name through fear of renewing their grief. In visits of condolence all are careful to make no mention of the deceased, and should any one happen to speak of him the relatives exclaim: "For God's sake do not mention his name!"

They occupy the possessions and offices of the deceased, and they are consoled by the share of the property which falls to them. But the dead are no longer remembered. *Their memory hath perished with a noise.* (Ps. ix, 7). Thus in a short time your death will be rather a source of joy; and in the very room in which you have breathed forth your soul, and in which you have been judged by Jesus Christ, others will dance and eat, and play and laugh as before! And where will your soul be then?

O God cast me not away from Thy face! For Thy mercy's sake cast me not away! Thou hast said: *Him that cometh to me I will not cast out.* (Jo. vi, 37). It is true that I have outraged Thee more than others, because I have been more favoured with Thy lights and graces. But the Blood which Thou hast shed for me gives me courage and pardon if I repent. My Sovereign Good, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee. Pardon

me and give me grace to love Thee for the future. I have offended Thee enough! The rest of my life I wish to spend in weeping unceasingly over the insults I have offered Thee and in loving with my whole heart a God worthy of infinite love. O Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

MENTAL PRAYER

III. ITS PLACE AND TIME

We can meditate in every place, at home or elsewhere, even when walking or working. How many are there who, not being able to do otherwise, raise their hearts to God and apply their minds to Mental Prayer without for this purpose leaving their occupations, their work, or meditate even when travelling. He who seeks God will find Him everywhere and at all times.

The essential condition of converse with God is solitude of the heart, without which prayer would be worthless, and, as St. Gregory says: "it would profit us little or nothing to be with the body in a solitary place, while the heart is full of worldly thoughts and affections." But to enjoy solitude of the heart, which consists in being disengaged from worldly thoughts and affections, deserts and caves are not, of course, necessary. Those who from necessity are obliged to converse with the world, whenever their hearts are free from worldly attachments, even in the public streets, in places of resort, and public assemblies, can possess a solitude of heart and continue united with God. All occupations we undertake in order to fulfil the Divine Will have no power to disturb the solitude of the heart. St. Catherine of Siena truly found God in the midst of the household labours in which her parents kept her employed in order to draw her from devotional exercises; for in the midst of these affairs she preserved a place of retirement in her heart, which she called her cell, and there ceased not to converse with God alone.

However, when we can, we should retire to a solitary place to make our Meditation. Our Lord has said: *When thou shalt pray, enter thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret.* St. Bernard says that silence and the absence of all noise almost force the soul to think of the goods of Heaven.

But the best place for making Mental Prayer is the church;

for Jesus Christ especially delights in the Meditation that is made before the Blessed Sacrament, since there it appears that 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 that 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 Loreto, where Jesus Christ dwelt during His life; and to Jerusalem, where He died on the Cross; but how much greater ought our devotion to be when we find Him before us in the Tabernacle, in which this Lord Himself dwells in person, Who lived on earth, 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 kings, both nobles and plebeians, rich and poor, can converse at their will, setting before Him their wants, and seeking His grace; and in the Tabernacle Jesus gives audience to all, hears all, and comforts all.

THE TIME

We have to consider two things, namely: (1) The time of day most suitable for Mental Prayer; and (2) The time to be spent in making it.

(1) According to St. Bonaventure, the morning and the evening are the two parts of the day which, ordinarily speaking, are the fittest for Meditation. But, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, the morning is the most seasonable time for prayer, because, says the Saint, when prayer precedes business, sin will not find entrance into the soul. And the Venerable Father Charles Carafa, Founder of the Congregation of the *Pious Workers*, used to say that a fervent act of love, made in the morning during Meditation, is sufficient to maintain the soul in fervour during the entire day. Prayer, as St. Jerome has written, is also necessary in the evening. Let not the body go to rest before the soul is refreshed by Mental Prayer, which is the food of the soul. But at all times and in all places we can pray; it is enough for us to raise the mind to God, and to make good acts, for in this consists Mental Prayer.

(2) With regard to the time to be spent in Mental Prayer, the rule of the Saints was, to devote to it all the hours that were not

necessary for the occupations of human life. St. Francis Borgia employed in Meditation eight hours in the day, because his Superiors would not allow him a longer time; and when the eight hours had expired, he earnestly asked permission to remain a little longer at prayer, saying: "Ah! give me another little quarter of an hour." St. Philip Neri was accustomed to spend the entire night in prayer. St. Anthony the Abbot remained the whole night in prayer; and when the sun appeared, which was the time assigned for terminating his prayer, he complained of its having risen too soon.

Father Balthassar Alvarez used to say that a soul that loves God, when not in prayer, is like a stone out of its centre, in a violent state; for in this life we should, as much as possible, imitate the lives of the Saints in bliss, who are constantly employed in the contemplation of God.

But what time should Religious who seek perfection devote to Mental Prayer? Father Torres prescribed an hour's Meditation in the morning, another during the day, and a half hour's Meditation in the evening, when they should not be hindered by sickness or by any duty of obedience. If to you this appears too much, I counsel you to give at least two hours to Mental Prayer. It is certain that a half hour's Meditation would not be sufficient to attain a high degree of perfection; for beginners, however, this would be sufficient.

Sometimes the Lord wishes you to omit prayer in order to perform some work of fraternal charity; but it is necessary to attend to what St. Laurence Justinian says: "When charity requires it, the spouse of Jesus goes to serve her neighbour; but during that time she continually sighs to return to converse with her Spouse in the solitude of her cell. Father Vincent Carafa, General of the Society of Jesus, stole as many little moments of time as he could, and employed them in prayer.

Mental Prayer is tedious to those who are attached to the world, but not to those who love God only. Ah! conversation with God is not painful or tedious to those who truly love Him. *His conversation has no bitterness, His company produces not tediousness, but joy and gladness* (Wis. viii, 16). "Mental Prayer," says St. John Climacus, "is nothing else than a familiar conversation and

union with God." "In prayer," as St. Chrysostom says, "the soul converses with God, and God with the soul." No, the life of holy persons who love prayer, and fly from earthly amusements, is not a life of bitterness. If you do not believe me, *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet*. Try it, and you shall see how sweet the Lord is to those who leave all things in order to converse with Him alone. But the end which we ought to propose to ourselves in going to Meditation should be, as has been said several times, not spiritual consolation, but to learn from Our Lord what He wishes from us, and to divest ourselves of all self-love. "To prepare yourself for prayer," says St. John Climacus, "put off your own will." To prepare ourselves well for Meditation, we must renounce self-will, and say to God: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. Lord, tell me what Thou wishest me to do; I am willing to do it. And it is necessary to say this with a resolute will, for without this disposition the Lord will not speak to us.

Evening Meditation

THE ABASEMENT OF JESUS

I.

Taking the form of a servant. (Phil. ii, 7).

The Eternal Word descends on earth to save man; and whence does He descend? *His going out is from the end of heaven*. (Ps. xviii, 7). He descends from the bosom of His Divine Father, where from eternity He was begotten in the brightness of the Saints. And whither does He descend? He descends into the womb of a Virgin, a child of Adam, which in comparison with the bosom of God is an object of horror; wherefore the Church sings: "Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb." Yes, because the Word in the bosom of the Father is God like the Father -- is immense, omnipotent, most blessed and supreme Lord, and equal in everything to the Father. But in the womb of Mary He is a creature, small, weak, afflicted, a servant inferior to the Father, *taking the form of a servant*. (Phil. ii, 7).

It is related as a great prodigy of humility in St. Alexis that, although he was the son of a Roman gentleman, he chose to live as a servant in his father's house. But how is the humility of this Saint to be compared to the humility of Jesus Christ? Between the son and the servant of the father of St. Alexis there was, it is

true, some difference; but between God and the servant of God there is an infinite difference.

My beloved Jesus, Thou art the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth; but for the love of me Thou hast made Thyself a servant even of the executioners who tore Thy flesh, pierced Thy head, and finally left Thee nailed on the Cross to die of sorrow. I adore Thee as my God and Lord, and I am ashamed to appear before Thee, when I remember how often for the sake of some miserable pleasure, I have broken Thy holy bonds, and have told Thee to Thy face that I would not serve Thee. Ah, Thou mayst justly reproach me: *Thou hast burst my bands, and thou saidst: I will not serve.* (Jer. ii, 20). But still, O my Saviour, Thy merits, and Thy goodness which cannot despise a heart that repents and humbles itself, give me courage to hope for pardon: *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* (Ps. 1, 19).

II.

Besides, this Son of God having become the servant of His Father, in obedience to Him, made Himself also the servant of His creatures, that is to say, of Mary and Joseph: *And he was subject to them.* (Luke ii, 51). Moreover, He made Himself even a servant of Pilate, who condemned Him to death, and He was obedient to him and accepted it; He became a servant of the executioners, who scourged Him, crowned Him with thorns, and crucified Him; and He humbly obeyed them all, and yielded Himself into their hands.

O God! and shall we, after this, refuse to submit ourselves to the service of so loving a Saviour, Who, to save us, has subjected Himself to such painful and degrading slavery? And rather than be the servants of this great and so loving a Lord, shall we be content to remain the slaves of the devil, who does not love his servants, but hates them and treats them like a tyrant, making them miserable and wretched in this world and in the next? But if we have been guilty of this great folly, why do we not quickly give up this unhappy servitude? Courage, then, since we have been delivered by Jesus Christ from the slavery of hell; let us now embrace and bind around us with love those sweet chains, which will render us servants and lovers of Jesus Christ, and hereafter obtain for us the crown of the eternal kingdom amongst the

Blessed in Paradise.

I confess, my Jesus, that I have offended Thee greatly; I confess that I deserve a thousand hells for the sins I have committed against Thee; chastise me as Thou seest fit, but do not deprive me of Thy grace and love. I repent above every other evil of having despised Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart. I propose from this day forth to desire to serve Thee and love Thee alone. I pray Thee bind me by Thy merits with chains of Thy holy love, and never suffer me to break those blessed chains again. I love Thee above everything, O my Deliverer; and I would prefer being Thy servant to being master of the whole world. And of what avail would all the world be to him who lives deprived of Thy grace? "My sweetest Jesus, permit me not to separate myself from Thee." This grace I ask of Thee, and I intend always to ask it, and I beg of Thee to grant me this day the grace to repeat continually to the end of my life the prayer: My Jesus, grant that I may never again separate myself from Thy love. I ask this favour of thee also, O Mary, my Mother: Help me by thy intercession that I may never separate myself again from my God.

Friday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE UNHAPPY LIFE OF THE SINNER

There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord. (Is. xlviii. 22).

No, the world with all its goods cannot content the heart of man. He was created, not for them, but for God alone. Hence God alone can make man content and happy, and give that peace which the world cannot give.

I.

In this life all men seek after peace. The merchant, the soldier, the man who goes to law -- all labour with the hope of making a fortune and of thus finding peace by worldly lucre, by a more exalted post, by gaining the law-suit. But poor worldlings seek from the world the peace that the world cannot give. God alone can give peace, as the Holy Church proclaims in the following words: "Give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." No; the world, with all its goods, cannot content the heart of man; for he was created, not for them, but for God

alone: hence God alone can make him happy and content. Brute animals, that have been made for sensual delights, find peace in earthly goods: give to an ox a bundle of hay, and to a dog a piece of flesh, and they are content, they desire nothing more. But the soul, which has been created for no other end than to love God, and to live in union with Him, shall never be able to find peace or happiness in sensual enjoyments; God alone can make her perfectly content.

The Son of God gave the appellation of fool to the rich man who, after having reaped a rich harvest from his fields, said to himself: *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer.* (Luke xii. 19). "Miserable fool!" says St. Basil, "have you the soul of a swine, of a brute, that you expect to make it happy by eating, drinking, or by sensual delights?" A man may be puffed up, but he cannot be satisfied, by the goods of this world. On the words of the Gospel, *behold we have left all things* (Matt. xix. 27), St. Bernard writes, that he saw different classes of fools labouring under different species of folly. All had a great thirst for happiness: some were satiated with the goods of the earth, which is a figure of the avaricious; others with wind, the figure of the ambitious, who seek after empty honours: others seated round a furnace, swallowing the sparks that were thrown from it; these were the passionate and vindictive: others, in fine, drank putrid waters from a fetid lake: and these were the voluptuous and unchaste. Hence, turning to them, the Saint exclaims: "O fools! do you not see that these things increase, rather than diminish, your thirst!"

Ah, my God, what now remains of all the offences I have offered to Thee, but pains, bitterness, and merits for hell? I am not sorry for the pain and remorse which I now feel; on the contrary they console me, because they are the gift of Thy grace, and make me hope that, since Thou inspirest these sentiments, Thou wishest to pardon me. What displeases me is the pain I have given Thee, my Redeemer, Who has loved me so tenderly. I deserved, O my Lord, to be abandoned by Thee, but instead of abandoning me, I see that Thou dost offer me pardon, and that Thou art the first to ask for a reconciliation. O my Jesus, I wish to make peace with Thee and I desire Thy grace more than any

earthly good.

II.

The goods of the world are but goods in appearance, and therefore they cannot satisfy the heart of man. *You have eaten*, says the Prophet Aggeus, *but have not been filled*. (Agg. i. 6). Hence, the more the avaricious man possesses, the more he seeks to acquire. "The possession of great wealth," says St. Augustine, "does not close, but rather extends, the jaws of avarice." The more the unchaste man wallows in the mire of impurity, the greater is his disgust, and, at the same time, his desire for such beastly pleasures; and how can dung and carnal filthiness content the heart? The same happens to the ambitious man, who wishes to satisfy his desires by smoke; for he always attends more to what he wants than to what he possesses. After having acquired many kingdoms, Alexander the Great wept, because he had no more kingdoms to conquer. If worldly goods could content the human heart, the rich and the monarchs of the earth would enjoy complete happiness; but experience shows the contrary. Solomon tells us that he refused no indulgence to his senses. *Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not*. (Eccles. ii. 10). But after all his sensual enjoyments what did he say? *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity*. (Ib. i. 2). -- That is, every thing in this world is mere vanity, a pure lie, pure folly.

I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee; I would wish to die of sorrow for my offences. Ah! through the love which Thou didst entertain for me when Thou didst expire on the Cross, pardon me, receive me into Thy Heart, and change my heart, so that henceforth I may please Thee as much as I have hitherto offended Thee. I now renounce, for Thy sake, all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I resolve to forfeit my life rather than lose Thy grace. Tell me what I must do in order to please Thee; I wish to do it. What pleasures, what honours, what riches, can I seek? I wish only for Thee, my God, my joy, my glory, my treasure, my life, my love, my All! Give me the grace to love Thee, and then do with me what Thou pleasest. Mary, my Mother and my hope, take me under thy protection and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

MENTAL PRAYER

IV. METHOD OF MAKING IT

Mental Prayer consists of three parts:

1. *The Preparation*; 2. *The Meditation proper*; 3. *The Conclusion*.
The Preparation.

Begin by disposing your mind and your body to enter into pious recollection.

Leave outside the door of the place where you are going to converse with God all extraneous or distracting thoughts, saying with St. Bernard: "O my thoughts, wait here! After prayer we shall treat on other matters." Be careful not to allow the mind to wander where it wishes.

The posture of the body most suitable for prayer is kneeling, but if this posture becomes so irksome as to cause distractions, we may, as St. John of the Cross tells us, make our Meditation modestly sitting down.

In the Preparation there should be three Acts:

1. An Act of Faith in the presence of God; 2. An Act of Humility and Contrition for sin; 3. An Act of Petition for light.

Be careful to make the Act of Faith in the presence of God well, for a lively remembrance of the Divine Presence contributes greatly to remove distractions. When a person is distracted in Meditation there is reason to think that he has not made a lively Act of Faith at the beginning. The three Acts should be made with fervour and should be short that we may pass immediately to the Meditation.

The Meditation Proper

When Mental Prayer is made in common, as in a Community of Religious, one person reads for the rest the subject of the Meditation and divides it into two parts. The first point is read at the beginning after the Prayers are said and the Preparatory Acts are made. The second point is read towards the middle of the half hour. One should read in a loud tone of voice, and slowly, so as to be well understood.

When you make Meditation in private you may always use a book, and stop when you find yourself most touched. St. Francis de Sales says that in this we should be as the bees that stop on a flower as long as they find any honey in it, and then pass to

another. We should stop at those passages in which the soul finds nourishment. St. Teresa used a book for seventeen years in this way. She would first read a little, then meditate for a short while on what she had read, in imitation of the dove that first drinks and then raises its eyes to heaven.

It should be remembered that the fruit of Mental Prayer does not consist so much in *meditating*, as in making *affections*, *petitions* and *resolutions*.

1. *Affections* -- When you reflect on the point of the Meditation just read, and feel any pious sentiment, raise your heart to God and offer Him an Act of *humility*, of *confidence*, *love*, *sorrow*, *gratitude*, *resignation*, *thanksgiving*, and so on. The Acts of *Love* and *Contrition* are the golden chain that binds the soul to God. An Act of *perfect Charity* is sufficient for the remission of all our sins. And among the Acts of Love towards God there is none more perfect than the taking delight in the infinite joy of God.

2. *Petitions* -- It is very profitable in Mental Prayer, and perhaps more useful than any other Act, to repeat petitions to God, asking with humility and confidence His graces -- His light, the strength we need to do His holy Will and to pray always, and especially the grace of Perseverance and His Holy Love.

The Ven. Paul Segneri says that until he studied Theology, he used to employ himself during the time of Mental Prayer making *Reflections* and *Affections*, but, "God afterwards opened my eyes," he says, "and thenceforward I endeavoured to employ myself in *Petitions*; and if there is any good in me I ascribe it all to this exercise of recommending myself to God." Do you likewise. Ask of God His graces in the Name of Jesus Christ and you will obtain whatever you desire.

3. *Resolutions* -- It is necessary to make a particular resolution in the Meditation. As, for example, to avoid some particular sin, or some defect into which you have more frequently fallen; to practise some particular virtue, such as to suffer the annoyance you receive from another person, to obey more exactly a certain superior, to perform some particular act of mortification. The same resolutions have to be made several times until we find we have got rid of the defect or acquired the virtue. Afterwards do not fail to reduce to practice the resolutions you have made, as

soon as the occasion is presented.

You would also do well to renew your Vows, or any particular engagement you have made with God. This renewal is most pleasing to God, and it multiplies the merit of the good work and draws down upon ourselves new help to persevere and grow in grace.

The Conclusion

The Conclusion consists of three acts:

1. *Thanking* God for the lights received, etc.; 2. Making a firm *purpose to keep our resolutions*; 3. *Asking God*, for the sake of Jesus and Mary, to give us the grace to be faithful to our resolutions.

Be careful never to omit, at the end of Meditation, to recommend to God the souls in Purgatory, and all poor sinners. St. John Chrysostom says nothing more clearly shows our love for Jesus Christ than our zeal in recommending our neighbours to Him.

A WORD ABOUT DISTRACTIONS AND DRYNESS IN PRAYER.

1. *Distractions*. Of these we must not take much account. It is enough to drive them away when they come. And besides, even the Saints suffered involuntary distractions. But they did not, on this account, leave off Meditation; and so also must we act. St. Francis of Sales says that if in Meditation we did nothing but drive away, or seek to drive away, distractions, our Meditation would be of great profit.

2. As for *Dryness of Spirit*, the greatest pain of souls in Meditation is to find themselves sometimes without a feeling of devotion, weary of Prayer, 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 steadfast in Meditation, and not leave off as the devil will suggest. At such a time let it unite its desolation to that which Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross. Let it repeat: *My Jesus, mercy! Lord, have mercy on me! Have pity on me! Leave me not, O Jesus!* Pray, and

doubt not that God will hear you and grant your petitions.

Evening Meditation

JESUS ENLIGHTENS THE WORLD AND GLORIFIES GOD.

I.

The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth. (Jer. xxxi. 22).

Before the coming of the Messias the world was buried in a dark night of ignorance and sin. The true God was hardly known, save in one single corner of the earth, that is to say, in Judea alone: *In Judea God is known.* (Ps. lxxv. 2). But everywhere else men adored as gods devils, beasts, and stones. Everywhere there reigned the night of sin, which blinds souls, and fills them with vices, and hides from them the sight of the miserable state in which they are living, as enemies of God, and worthy only of hell: *Thou hast appointed darkness and it is night; in it shall all the beasts of the wood go about.* (Ps. ciii. 20).

From this darkness Jesus came to deliver the world: *To them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen.* (Is. ix. 2). He delivered it from idolatry by making known the light of the true God; and He delivered the world from sin by the light of His doctrine and of His divine example: *For this purpose the Son of God appeared that he might destroy the work of the devil.* (I Jo. iii. 8).

My eternal God, I have dishonoured Thee by so often preferring my will to Thine, and my vile and miserable pleasures to Thy holy grace. What hope of pardon would there be for me, if Thou hadst not given me Jesus Christ, our Saviour, that He might be the Hope of us miserable sinners? *He is a propitiation for our sins* (I Jo. ii. 2). Yes; for Jesus Christ, in sacrificing His life in satisfaction for the injuries we have done Thee, has given more honour to Thee than we have dishonour by our sins. Receive me, therefore, O my Father, for the love of Jesus Christ. I repent, O infinite Goodness, of having outraged Thee: *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son.* (Luke xv. 21). I am not worthy of forgiveness; but Jesus Christ is worthy to be heard favourably by Thee. He prayed once for me on the Cross: *Father, forgive;* and even now in Heaven He is constantly begging Thee to receive me as a son: *We have an advocate, Jesus Christ, who ever intercedes for us.* (Rom. vii.

34). Receive an ungrateful son, who once forsook Thee, but now returns resolved to desire to love Thee.

II.

The Prophet Jeremias foretold that God would create a new Child to be the Redeemer of men: *The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth.* (Jer. xxxi. 22). This new Child is Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, Who is the object of the love of all the Saints in Paradise, and is the Love of the Father Himself, Who thus speaks of Him: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* (Matt. xvii. 5). And this Son is He Who made Himself man. A new Child, because He gave more glory and honour to God in the first moment of His creation than all the Angels and Saints together have given Him, or shall give Him for all eternity. And therefore did the Angels at the birth of Jesus sing: *Glory to God in the highest.* (Luke ii. 14). The Child Jesus has rendered more glory to God than men have deprived Him of by all their sins.

Let us therefore, poor sinners, take courage; let us offer to the eternal Father this Infant; let us present to Him the tears, the obedience, the humility, the death, and the merits of Jesus Christ, and we shall make reparation to God for all the dishonour we have caused Him by our offences.

Yes, my Father, I love Thee and I will always love Thee. O my Father, now that I know well the love Thou hast borne me, and the patience which Thou hast shown me for so many years, I resolve no longer to live without loving Thee. Give me a great love so that I may constantly lament the displeasure I have given Thee, Who art so good a Father; cause me ever to burn with love towards Thee, Who art so loving a Father towards me. My Father, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee! O Mary! God is my Father, and thou art my Mother. Thou canst do all things with God; help me; obtain for me holy perseverance and His holy love.

Saturday--First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE POWER OF MARY'S INTERCESSION

With me are riches ... that I may enrich them that love me. (Prov. viii. 18).

If the prayers of the Saints are very powerful with God, how great must be the power of Mary's prayers! The former are the prayers of servants, the latter the prayers of a Mother! Blessed is that person, then, for whom Mary prays. Holy Mother of God, pray for us!

I.

St. Bernard tells us that Mary has received a twofold fulness of grace. The first was in the Incarnation of the Word Who was made Man in her most holy womb; the second in that fulness of grace which we receive from God by means of her prayers. So that whatever good we have from God is received through the intercession of Mary! If the prayers of the Saints are so powerful with God, how great must be the power of those of His Mother. The former are the prayers of *servants*, the latter the prayers of a *Mother*! The prayers of Mary have the force of a command with Jesus Christ. Hence it is impossible for the Son not to grant a grace for which the Mother asks. "Rejoice, rejoice, O Mary," says St. Methodius, "thou hast thy Son for a debtor. We are all debtors to Him, but He is a debtor to thee alone." Blessed, then, is the person for whom Mary prays!

O great Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me! Behold the miseries of my soul and pity me. Pray and never cease to pray until thou seest me safe in Paradise. O Mary, thou art my hope; abandon me not. Holy Mother of God, pray for me.

II.

Jesus rejoices when His most beloved Mother prays to Him, that He may have the pleasure of granting her all she asks. One day St. Bridget heard Jesus speak to Mary and say "O Mother, thou well knowest that I cannot do otherwise than grant thy prayers; therefore, ask of Me what thou wilt. Since thou, when on earth, didst deny me nothing, it is becoming, now that I am in Heaven, that I should deny thee nothing that thou asketh of

Me." Mary has only to speak and her Divine Son grants her all she asks. Let us, therefore, pray to His Divine Mother without ceasing, if we wish to secure our eternal salvation, and let us address her in the words of St. Andrew of Crete: "We beseech thee, therefore, O holy Virgin, to grant us the help of thy prayers with God; prayers that are more precious than all the treasures of the world; prayers that obtain for us a very great abundance of graces; prayers that confound all enemies, and triumph over their strength."

Ah, my Lady, had I always invoked thee in temptation I should never have fallen. In the future I will never cease to invoke thee, saying: Mary, help me! Mary, succour me! Amen.

Spiritual Reading

THE VALUE OF SPIRITUAL READING

To a spiritual life *the Reading of Holy Books* is, perhaps, not less useful than *Mental Prayer*. St. Bernard says that reading instructs at once both in prayer and in the practice of virtue. Hence, he concluded that *Spiritual Reading and Prayer are the weapons by which hell is conquered and Heaven is won*.

We cannot always have access to a Spiritual Father for counsel in our actions, and particularly in our doubts; but reading will abundantly supply his place by giving us light and direction to escape the illusions of the devil and of our own self-love, and at the same time to submit to the Divine Will. St. Athanasius used to say that no one is found devoted to the service of God who does not practise Spiritual Reading. Hence all the Founders of Religious Orders have strongly recommended this holy exercise to their Religious. But above all the Apostle, St. Paul, prescribed Spiritual Reading to Timothy. *Attend unto reading*. (Tim. iv. 3). Mark the word attend, which signifies that although Timothy, being a Bishop, was greatly occupied with the care of his flock, still the Apostle wished him to attend to the reading of holy books, not in a passing way and for a short time, but regularly and for a considerable time.

The reading of spiritual books is as profitable as the reading of bad books is noxious. The first author of pious books is the Spirit of God, as the author of pernicious writings is the devil. Consider some of the great blessings the reading of spiritual

books brings to the soul.

As the reading of bad books fills the mind with worldly and poisonous sentiments, so pious reading fills the soul with holy thoughts and good desires. He that keeps the mind filled with devout thoughts, such as spiritual maxims, examples of the virtuous actions of the Saints, will, not only during prayer, but at other times also, be accompanied by these thoughts, and by them be kept almost continually united to God. St. Bernard explains this by a beautiful similitude in his exposition of the words *seek and you shall find* (Matt. vii. 7), when he says: "*Seek* by reading books of devotion, *and you shall find* in Meditation; for reading, as it were, puts the food in the mouth, which is afterwards masticated by Meditation.

The soul that is imbued with holy thoughts in Reading is ever and always prepared to banish its internal temptations. St. Jerome advised his disciple, Salvina: "Endeavour to have ever in your hands a pious book that with this shield you may repel all the arrows of bad thoughts."

Spiritual Reading serves to make us see the stains that infect the soul, and helps us to remove them. The same St. Jerome recommends Demetriade to avail herself of Spiritual Reading as of a mirror. As a mirror exhibits the stains of the countenance, so holy books show us the defects of the soul. St. Gregory, speaking of Spiritual Reading says: "There we perceive the losses we have sustained and the good things we have acquired; our falling back or our progress in virtue."

In the reading of holy books we receive many lights and divine calls. St. Jerome says that when we *pray* we speak to God; but when we *read*, God speaks to us. St. Ambrose says the same: "We address Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read." In prayer God hears our petitions, but in reading we listen to His voice. We cannot, as I have already said, always have at hand a Spiritual Father, nor often hear the sermons of sacred orators, to direct us and give us light to walk well in the way of God. Good books supply the place of sermons. St. Augustine writes that good books are, as it were, so many "love-letters" the Lord sends us. In them He warns us of our dangers, teaches us the way of salvation, animates us to suffer adversity, enlightens us and

inflames us with Divine love. Whoever, then, desires to acquire divine love and to be holy, should often read those letters of Paradise. Oh, how many Saints have, by the reading of a spiritual book, been induced to forsake the world and to give themselves to God! St. Augustine, St. Ignatius, St. John Colombino, and many more. "My God," exclaims St. Augustine, "the examples of Thy servants, when I meditated on them, consumed my tepidity and inflamed me with Thy holy love."

But to draw great fruit from Spiritual Reading:

(1) You should recommend yourself beforehand to God that He may enlighten the mind while you read. It has already been said that in Spiritual Reading the Lord condescends to speak to us; and therefore, in taking up the book, we should pray to God in the words of Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth* (1 Kings, iii. 9). Speak, O my God, for I wish to obey Thee in all Thou shalt make known to me to be Thy will.

(2) You should read, not in order to acquire learning, or to indulge curiosity, but for the sole purpose of advancing in divine love. To read for the sake of mere knowledge is not *Spiritual Reading*, but rather, at that particular time, a study unprofitable to the soul. It is still worse to read through curiosity, as certain people do, who devour books, seeking only to finish them in a short time in order to gratify curiosity. All the time devoted to such reading is time lost. St. Gregory says that many read, and read a great deal, but because they read from curiosity they rise from the reading as hungry as if they had not been reading.

(3) You should therefore read pious books slowly and with attention. "Nourish your soul with divine reading," says St. Augustine. Now, to receive nourishment from food it must not be devoured, but well masticated. Masticate and ponder well what you read, applying to yourself what is there inculcated. And when what you read makes a lively impression on you, St. Ephrem counsels you to read it a second time. Imitate the bees that will not pass to another flower until they have gathered all the honey to be found in the first.

(4) When you receive any special light in your reading, or any instruction that penetrates the heart, it will be very useful to stop, and to raise the mind to God by making a good resolution,

or a good act, or a fervent prayer. And at the end of your reading select some sentiment of devotion excited by what you have read and carry it away with you as a flower from a Garden of Delights.

Evening Meditation

THE SON OF GOD WAS LADEN WITH ALL OUR INIQUITIES.

I.

God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and of sin, hath condemned sin in the flesh. (Rom. viii. 3).

Consider the humble state to which the Son of God chose to abase Himself. He vouchsafed to take upon Himself the form, not only of a servant, but of a sinful servant, *appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh*. Therefore, St. Bernard writes: "He assumed not merely the form of a servant, that He might be under subjection, but even that of a wicked servant, that He might be beaten." He would assume not only the condition of a servant—He Who was Lord of all; but even the appearance of a guilty servant—He who was the Saint of Saints. For this end He clothed Himself with that same flesh of Adam which had been infected with sin. Our Redeemer, in order to obtain salvation for us, offered Himself voluntarily to His Father to make satisfaction for all our sins: *He was offered because it was his own will.* (Is. liii. 7). And His Father loaded Him with all our crimes: *He hath laid on him the iniquities of us all.* (Ib. 6). And thus, behold the Divine Word, innocent, most pure and holy—behold Him, even as an Infant, charged with all the blasphemies, with all the impurities, with all the sacrileges, and all the other crimes of men; and in this way become, for the love of us, the object of Divine malediction, on account of the sins for which He had bound Himself to satisfy the Divine Justice.

O my innocent Lord, Mirror without spot, Love of the Eternal Father! Ah, no, chastisements and maledictions were not due to Thee; but they were due to me, a miserable sinner. Nevertheless, Thou wouldst show to the world this excess of love, by sacrificing Thy life to obtain pardon and salvation for us, paying by Thy sufferings the penalties which we had deserved. May all creatures praise and bless Thy infinite mercy and goodness!

I thank Thee on behalf of all men, but especially for myself; because as I have offended Thee more than others, so Thou hast suffered the pains which Thou didst endure, more for me than for others. I curse a thousand times those sinful pleasures of mine, which have cost Thee so much suffering. But since Thou hast paid the price of my ransom, oh, let not the Blood which Thou hast shed for me be lost to me. I am sorry that I have despised Thee, O my Love; but, oh, give me more sorrow.

II.

Jesus loaded Himself with as many maledictions as there ever have been, or ever will be mortal sins committed by all mankind. And in this state He presented Himself to His Father when He came into the world. Yes, even from the commencement of His life, he presented Himself as a criminal and a debtor for all our misdeeds, and as such was condemned by His Father to die upon a Cross as a malefactor, and accursed. *God hath condemned sin in the flesh.* (Rom. viii. 3). Oh, if the Eternal Father had been capable of feeling grief, what anguish would He not have endured, at seeing Himself obliged to treat as a criminal, and the most, monstrous criminal in the world, this innocent Son, His beloved One, Who was so worthy of all His love! *Behold the Man!* said Pilate, when he showed Jesus to the Jews, in order to move them to pity for this innocent One so cruelly treated. *Behold the Man!* the Eternal Father seems to say to us all, showing Him to us in the stable of Bethlehem: -- "This poor Infant, Whom you behold, O men, laid in a manger for beasts, and lying upon straw, is My beloved Son, Who has come to take upon Himself your sins and your sorrows! Love Him, then, because He is most worthy of your love, and you are under the greatest obligations to love Him."

Make me know the evil I have committed in offending Thee, my Redeemer and my God, Who hast suffered so much to oblige me to love Thee! I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, but I desire to love Thee more; I desire to love Thee as much as Thou deservest to be loved. Make Thyself loved, O my Jesus, make Thyself loved by me and by all men; for well dost Thou deserve to be loved. Enlighten, I pray Thee, the minds of those sinners who will not know Thee, or will not love Thee; make them compre-

hend how much Thou hast done for love of them, and the desire Thou hast for their salvation. Most holy Mary, pray for me and for all sinners; obtain for us light and grace to love thy Son, Who has loved us so much.

Second Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE ADVANTAGES OF TRIBULATIONS

What things soever were written were written for our learning, that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.

(Epistle of Sunday. Rom. xv. 4-13).

In tribulations God enriches His beloved souls with the greatest graces. It is *in his chains* that St. John comes to the knowledge of the works of Jesus Christ. *Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which we are chastised have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction* (Judith, viii. 27).

I.

By tribulation we atone for the sins we have committed much better than by voluntary works of penance. "Be assured," says St. Augustine, "that God is a physician, and that tribulation is a salutary medicine." Oh, how great is the efficacy of tribulation in healing the wounds caused by our sins! Hence the same Saint rebukes the sinner who complains of God for sending him tribulations. "Why," he says, "do you complain? What you suffer is a remedy, not a punishment." Job called those men happy whom God corrects by tribulation; because He heals them with the very hands by which He strikes and wounds them. *Blessed is the man whom God correcteth... For he woundeth and cureth. He striketh, and his hand shall heal* (Job v. 17). Hence, St. Paul gloried in his tribulations: *We glory also in tribulations* (Rom. v. 3).

Tribulations enable us to acquire great merits before God, by giving us opportunities of exercising the virtues of humility, of patience, and of resignation to the divine will. The Blessed John of Avila used to say that one *Blessed be God* in adversity is worth more than a thousand in prosperity. "Take away," says St. Ambrose, "the contests of the Martyrs, and you have taken away their crowns." Oh, what a treasure of merit is acquired by patiently bearing insults, poverty, and sickness! Insults from men

were the great object of the desires of the Saints, who sought to be despised for the love of Jesus Christ, and thus to be made like unto Him.

My Jesus, I have hitherto offended Thee grievously by resisting Thy holy Will. This gives me greater pain than if I had suffered every other evil. I repent of it and I am sorry for it with my whole heart. I deserve chastisement: I do not refuse it: I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of Thy love, and then do with me what Thou pleasest. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer! I love Thee, my God! And because I love Thee, I wish to do whatever Thou wishest. Amen.

II.

St. Francis de Sales used to say: "To suffer constantly for Jesus is the science of the Saints; we shall thus soon become Saints." It is by sufferings that God proves His servants, and finds them worthy of Himself. *God hath tried them and found them worthy of himself* (Wis. iii. 5). *Whom, says St. Paul, the Lord loveth he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* (Heb. xii. 6). Hence, Jesus Christ once said to St. Teresa: "Be assured that the souls dearest to My Father are those who suffer the greatest afflictions." Hence Job said: *If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?* (Job ii. 10). If we have gladly received from God the goods of this earth, why should we not receive more cheerfully tribulations, which are far more useful to us than worldly prosperity? St. Gregory informs us that, as a flame fanned by the wind increases, so the soul is made perfect when she is oppressed by tribulations.

In fine, the scourges of Heaven are sent, not for our injury, but for our good. *Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which, like servants, we are chastised, have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction* (Judith, viii. 27). "God," says St. Augustine, "is angry when He does not scourge the sinner." When we see a sinner in tribulation in this life, we may infer that God wishes to have mercy on him in the next, and that he exchanges eternal for temporal chastisement. But miserable the sinner whom the Lord does not punish in this life! For those whom He does not chastise here, He treasures up His wrath, and for them He reserves eternal chastisement.

O Will of God, Thou art my love! O Blood of Jesus, Thou art my hope! I hope to be from this day forward always united to Thy Divine Will. It shall be my guide, my desire, my love, my hope. *Thy Will be done!* My Jesus, through Thy merits grant me the grace always to repeat: *Thy Will be done! Thy Will be done!*

Ah, my blessed Mother Mary, thou hast been pleased to suffer so much for me, obtain for me, by thy merits, sorrow for my sins, and patience under the trials of life which will always be light in comparison with my demerits for I have often deserved hell. Immaculate Virgin, from thee do I hope for help to bear all crosses with patience. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

THE POVERTY OF THE INFANT JESUS

What went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. (Gospel of Sunday. Matt. xi. 2-10).

Instead of soft garments the Infant Jesus has but a few poor, rough, cold, damp rags. "The Creator of the Angels," says St. Peter Damian, "is not said to be clothed in purple but to have been wrapped in rags." Everything that is in Heaven and on earth is God's: *The world is mine, and the fulness thereof* (Ps. xlix. 12). But even this is little. Heaven and earth are but the least portions of the riches of God. The riches of God are infinite, and can never fail, because His riches do not depend on others, but He, Who is the Infinite Good, possesses them Himself. For this reason it was that David said: *Thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods* (Ps. xv. 2). Now this God, Who is so rich, made Himself poor by becoming Man, that He might thereby make us poor sinners rich: *Being rich, he became poor for your sakes; that through his poverty you might be rich* (2 Cor. viii. 9).

What! a God become poor? And why? Let us understand the reason. The riches of this world can be nothing but dust and mire; but it is mire that so completely blinds men that they can no longer see which are the true riches. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, the world was full of darkness because it was full of sin: *All flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth* (Gen. vi. 12). Mankind had corrupted the law and reason, so that, living like brutes, intent only on acquiring the riches and pleasures of this

world, men cared no more for the riches of eternity. But the divine mercy ordained that the very Son of God Himself should come down to enlighten these blind creatures: *To them that dwell in the region of the shadow of death light is risen* (Is. ix. 2).

Jesus was called the Light of the Gentiles: *A light for the revelation of the Gentiles* (Luke ii. 32); *The light shineth in darkness* (Jo. i. 5). Thus did the Lord from the first promise to be Himself our Master, and a Master Who should be seen by us; Who should teach us the way of salvation, which consists in the practice of all the virtues, and especially that of holy poverty: *And thy eyes shall see thy Teacher*. Moreover, this Master was not only to teach us by His words; but still more by the example of His life.

St. Bernard says that poverty was not to be found in Heaven, it existed only on earth; but that man, not knowing its value, did not seek after it. Therefore the Son of God came down from Heaven to this earth, and chose it for His companion throughout His whole life, that by His example He might also render it precious and desirable to us: "Poverty was not found in Heaven, but she was well known on earth, and men knew not her excellence. So the Son of God loved her and came down from Heaven to take her to Himself, that we might learn to value her when we see how He regards her." And behold our Redeemer as an Infant, Who at the very beginning of His life made Himself a Teacher of poverty in the Cave of Bethlehem; which is expressly called by the same St. Bernard the *School of Christ*, and by St. Augustine the *Grotto of Doctrine*.

For this end was it decreed by God that the Edict of Caesar should come forth; namely, that His Son should not only be born poor, but the poorest of men, causing Him to be born away from His own house, in a cave which was inhabited by animals. Other poor people, who are born in their own houses, have certainly more comforts in the way of clothes, of fire, and the assistance of persons who lend their aid, even if it is out of compassion. What son of a poor mother was ever born in a stable? In a stable beasts only are born. St. Luke relates how it happened. The time being come that Mary was to be delivered, Joseph goes to seek some lodging for her in Bethlehem. He goes about and enquires at every house, and he finds none. He tries to find one in an inn, but

neither there does he find any: *There was no room for them in the inn* (Luke ii. 7). So that Mary is obliged to take shelter and bring forth her Son in that cave.

When the sons of princes are born, they have warm rooms prepared for them, adorned with hangings, silver cradles, the finest clothes, and they are waited on by the highest nobles and ladies in the kingdom. The King of Heaven, instead of a warm and beautiful room, has nothing but a cold grotto, whose only ornament is the grass that grows there; instead of a bed of feathers, He has nothing but a little hard, sharp straw; instead of fine garments He has but a few poor, rough, cold and damp rags: "The Creator of Angels," writes St. Peter Damien, "is not said to have been clad in purple, but to have been wrapped in rags. Let worldly pride blush at the resplendent humility of the Saviour." Instead of a fire, and of the attendance of great people, He has but the warm breath and the company of two animals; finally, in place of the silver cradle, He must lie in a vile manger. "What is this," said St. Gregory of Nyssa, "the King of kings, Who fills Heaven and earth with His presence finds no better place in which to be born than a stable for beasts! He Who encompasses all things in His embrace is laid in the manger of brute cattle." Yes, this King of kings for our sake wished to be poor and the poorest of all. Even the children of the poor have milk enough provided for them, but Jesus Christ wished to be poor even in this; for the milk of Mary was miraculous, and she received it not naturally, but from Heaven, as the Holy Church teaches us: "The Virgin gave Him milk from a breast filled from Heaven." And God, in order to comply with the desire of His Son, Who wished to be poor in everything, did not provide Mary with milk in abundance, but only with as much as would barely suffice to sustain the life of her Son; whence the same Holy Church says: "He was fed on a little milk."

And Jesus Christ, as He was born poor, continued in poverty all His life long.

Evening Meditation

GOD SENDS HIS SON TO DIE IN ORDER TO RESTORE US TO LIFE.

I.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ (Eph. ii. 4, 5).

Consider that sin is the death of the soul, because this enemy of God deprives us of Divine grace, which is the life of the soul. We, therefore, miserable sinners, were already by our sins dead and condemned to hell. God, through the immense love which He bears to our souls, determined to restore us to life; and how did He do so? He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die, in order that by His death He might restore us to life.

With reason therefore does the Apostle call this work of love *exceeding charity*; too much love; yes, indeed, for man could never have had hope to receive life in such a loving manner if God had not found this means of redeeming him: *Having obtained eternal redemption* (Heb. ix. 12). All men were therefore dead -- there was no remedy for them. But the Son of God, through the bowels of His mercy has come down from Heaven, the Orient from on High, and has given us life. Justly, therefore, does the Apostle call Jesus Christ our Life: *When Christ shall appear, who is your life* (Col. iii. 4).

O my Jesus! If Thou hadst not accepted and suffered death for me, I should have remained dead in my sins, without hope of salvation and without the power of ever loving Thee. But though Thou hast obtained life for me by Thy death, I have again many times voluntarily forfeited it by returning to sin. Thou didst die to gain my heart to Thyself, and I by my rebellion have made it a slave of the devil. I lost all reverence for Thee, and I said that I would no longer have Thee for my Master. All this is true; but it is also true that Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live; and therefore didst Thou die to give us life. I repent of having offended Thee, my dearest Redeemer; and do Thou pardon me through the merits of Thy Passion; give me Thy grace.

II.

Behold, our Redeemer clothed with flesh and become an Infant, says: *I have come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly* (Jo. x. 10). For this end He accepted death, that He might give us life. It is but reasonable, therefore, that we

should live only to God, Who has condescended to die for us: *Christ died, that they who live may not live to themselves, but unto him who died for them* (2 Cor. V. 15). It is reasonable that Jesus Christ should be the only Sovereign of our hearts since He has spent His blood and His life to gain them to Himself: *To this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living* (Rom. xiv. 9). O my God! who would be so ungrateful a wretch as to believe it an Article of Faith that God died to secure his love, and yet refuse to love Him, and, renouncing His friendship, choose voluntarily to make himself a slave of hell?

O Lord, give me that life which Thou hast purchased for me by Thy death, and henceforth mayst Thou have entire dominion over my heart. Never let the devil have possession of it again; he is not my God, he does not love me, and has not suffered anything for me. In past times he was not the true sovereign, but the robber of my soul; Thou alone, my Jesus, art my true Lord, Who hast created and redeemed me with Thy Blood; Thou alone hast loved me, and oh, how much! It is therefore only just that I should be Thine alone during the life that remains to me. Tell me what Thou wouldst have me to do; for I will do it all. Chastise me as Thou wilt; I accept everything Thou sendest me; only spare me the chastisement of living without Thy love; make me love Thee, and then dispose of me as Thou wilt. Most holy Mary, my refuge and consolation, recommend me to thy Son; His death and thy intercession are all my hope.

Monday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. I.

Consider that salvation is assured to souls who enter the Religious state.

God has placed us in the world and keeps us here in life, not to acquire the perishable goods of earth, but the eternal goods of Heaven. *The end is life everlasting* (Rom. vi. 22). But the misfortune is that in the world men think very little indeed, if at all, of eternal life, and only dream of acquiring honours and pleasures, and this is the reason why so many souls perish.

I.

To understand the importance of our eternal salvation it is enough to have Faith and to consider we have only one soul, and if that is lost, all is lost were a man even master of the whole world. *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?* (Matt. xvi. 26). This great maxim of the Gospel has induced many youths to shut themselves up in cloisters, others to live in deserts, and others to give up their lives for Jesus Christ. For, said they, what does it profit us to possess the whole world, and all the goods of this world, in this present life, which must soon finish, and then be damned and be miserable in the life to come, which will never end? All those rich men, all those princes and emperors, who are now in hell -- what have they now of all they enjoyed in this life but greater torment and a greater despair? Miserable beings! They lament now and say: *All those things are passed away like a shadow* (Wis. v. 9). For them all is passed like a shadow, like a dream, and that lamentation which is their lot has lasted already many years, and will last throughout all eternity. *The fashion of this world passeth away* (1 Cor. vii. 51). This world is a scene which lasts but a short time; happy he who plays in this scene that part which will afterwards make him happy in the life which will never end. When he shall then be contented, honoured, and a prince in Paradise, so long as God shall be God, little will he care for having been in this world -- poor, despised and in tribulation. For this end alone God has placed us on this earth, and keeps us here in life, not to acquire transitory but eternal goods: *The end is life everlasting*.

O my God! How have I ever deserved this great mercy, that, having left so many others to live in the midst of the world, Thou hast willed to call me, who have offended Thee more than others, and deserved, more than they, to be deprived of Thy divine light, to enjoy the honour of living as a friend in Thy own house! O Lord, grant that I may understand this exceeding grace, which Thou hast bestowed on me, that I may always thank Thee for it, as I purpose and hope to do always during my life and throughout eternity, and do not permit me to be ungrateful for it. Since Thou hast been so liberal towards me, and hast in Thy love preferred me to others, it is but just that more than others I should serve and love Thee.

II.

With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart (Jer. xii. 11). How few are they who reflect on death, by which for us the scene is closed; on the eternity which awaits us; on what God has done for our sake! And hence it comes that these miserable beings live in blindness and carelessly, far from God, having their eyes, like the beasts, intent only on earthly things, without remembering God, without desiring His love, and without a thought of eternity. Therefore, they die afterwards an unhappy death, which will be the beginning of eternal death and endless misery. Then it is they will open their eyes; but it will be only to lament over their own foolishness.

This is the great means of salvation which is found in Religion, namely, continual meditation on the eternal truths. *Remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin* (Eccles. vii. 40). In well-regulated Religious houses this is done every day, and even several times a day. And therefore in the light of divine things, which there shines continually, it is morally impossible to live, at least for a long time, far from God, and without keeping one's account ready for eternity.

O my Jesus! Thou wouldst have me to be wholly Thine, and to Thee I give myself entirely. Accept me, and henceforward keep me as Thy own, since I am no longer mine. Finish Thou the work which Thou hast begun. Thou hast called me to Thy house, because Thou wilt have me become a Saint. Make me then what Thou wilt have me. Do it, O Eternal Father! for the love of Jesus Christ, in Whom is all my confidence. I love Thee, my sovereign Good, I love Thee. O infinite Goodness! I love Thee alone, and will love Thee forever. O Mary, my hope, succour me, and obtain for me to be always faithful and thankful to my Lord.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

I. HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO FOLLOW A VOCATION TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

It is evident our Eternal Salvation depends principally upon the choice of a state of life. Father Louis of Granada calls the choice of a state the main-spring of the whole life. Just as in a

clock when the main-spring is out of order the whole clock goes wrong, so in the order of our salvation, if we fail to enter the state to which we are called, the whole life, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, is in disorder.

If, then, we wish to make our eternal salvation secure we must, in our choice of a state, embrace the Divine Vocation in which God has prepared for us the efficacious means of salvation. For, as St. Cyprian says: "the grace of the Holy Ghost is given according to the order of Divine Providence and not according to our own caprice." And in this sense St. Paul writes: *Everyone has his proper gift from God* (1 Cor. vii. 7). That is, God gives to each one his Vocation, chooses the state in which He wills him to be saved. And this is the order of predestination described by the same Apostle: *Whom he predestinated, them he also called: and whom he called them he also justified ... and them he also glorified* (Rom. viii. 30).

And here we must remark that in the world there are some who pay little attention to this question of Vocation. They think it to be all the same, whether they live in the state to which God calls them, or in that which they themselves choose, following their own inclinations, and this is why so many lead a bad life and lose their souls. It is certain that this is the principal point with regard to the acquisition of eternal life. Vocation is followed by justification, and justification by glorification, that is, eternal life. He who disturbs this order and breaks this chain of salvation shall not save his soul. With all his labours and with all the good he may do, the words of St. Augustine apply to him: "Thou runnest well, but off the road," that is, out of the way in which God called you to walk for attaining salvation. The Lord does not accept sacrifices, which are purely of our own making: *But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect* (Gen. iv. 5). Rather He threatens with great chastisement those who, when He calls them, turn their backs on Him in order to follow the counsels of their own caprice. *Woe to you apostate children*, He says through Isaias, *that you would take counsel and not from me, and would begin a web and not by my spirit* (Is. xxx. 1).

A divine call to a more perfect life is undoubtedly a special and a very great grace which God does not give to all; hence He

has much reason to be displeased with those who despise it. How greatly would not a prince think himself offended, if he should call one of his vassals to serve near his person, and he should refuse to obey! And should God not resent like conduct? Ah! He resents it very much indeed, and threatens, saying: *Woe to him that gainsayeth his Maker* (Ib. xiv. 9). The word "Woe" in Scripture signifies eternal damnation. The chastisement of the disobedient will begin even in this life, in which he will always be uneasy, for, says Job, *Who hath resisted him and hath had peace?* (Job ix. 4). He will be deprived of those abundant and efficacious helps necessary to lead a good life. For which reason the Theologian, Habert, writes "He will with great difficulty be able to work out his salvation." He will with great difficulty save himself; for, being like a member out of its proper place, he will with great difficulty be able to live well. "In the body of the Church," adds the learned author, "he will be like a limb of the human body out of its place, which may be able to perform its functions, but only with difficulty and in an awkward manner." Hence, he concludes: "And although, absolutely speaking, he may be saved, he will with difficulty enter upon and advance in the road, and use the means of salvation." The same thing is taught by St. Bernard and St. Leo. St. Gregory, writing to the Emperor Maurice, who by an Edict had forbidden soldiers to become Religious, says that this was an unjust law, which shut the gates of Paradise to many, because many would save themselves in Religion who would otherwise perish in the world.

Father Lancicius tells us there was in the Roman College a youth of great talents. While he was making the Religious Exercises, he asked his confessor whether it was a sin not to correspond to a Vocation to the Religious life. The confessor replied that in itself it was not a grievous sin, because a call to perfection is a *counsel* and not a *precept*, but he would expose his salvation to great danger as had happened to many who, not following their Vocation, were in the end, lost. He did not obey the call. He went to study in Macerata, where he soon began to omit prayer and Holy Communion, and finally gave himself up to a bad life. Soon after, coming one night from the house of a wicked woman, he was mortally wounded by a rival. Some priests ran to his

assistance, but he had expired before they arrived, just in front of the college. By this circumstance God wished to show that this chastisement came upon him for having neglected his Vocation.

Father Pinamonti relates in his treatise, *Victorious Vocation*, that a Novice who had resolved to leave the Novitiate had a vision. He saw Christ on a throne in wrath, ordering his name to be blotted out of the Book of Life. He was so terrified that he persevered in his Vocation.

How many similar examples are there not to be found in books! And how many unhappy youths shall we not see damned on the Day of Judgment for not having followed their Vocation! Such are rebels against the divine light, as the Holy Ghost says: *They have been rebellious to the light, they have not known his ways* (Job xxiv. 13), and they will be justly punished by losing the light; and because they would not walk in the way shown them by the Lord, they shall walk without light in that chosen by their own caprice, and perish. *Behold I will declare my spirit to you* (Prov. i. 23). Behold the Call of God -- but because they fail to follow it, God adds: *Because I called you and you refused ... you have despised all my counsel ... I also will laugh in your destruction, and I will mock when that shall come upon you which you feared. Then shall you call upon me, and I will not hear: they shall rise in the morning and shall not find me. Because they have hated instruction and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to my counsel, but despised all my reproof* (Ib. i. 24, 26, 28, 80). And this signifies that God will not hear the prayers of him who has neglected to obey His voice. St. Augustine says: "They who have despised the will of God which invited them, shall feel the will of God when it becomes its own avenger."

Evening Meditation

THE LOVE THAT THE SON OF GOD HAS SHOWN
US IN THE REDEMPTION

I.

He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us (Eph. v. 2).

Consider that the Eternal Word is that God Who is so infinitely happy in Himself that His happiness cannot be greater than it is, nor could the salvation of all mankind have added anything to it; nor could the loss of souls have diminished it; and yet

He has done and suffered so much to save us miserable worms that if His beatitude, as St. Thomas says, had depended on that of man, He could not have done or suffered more: "As if without him He could not be happy." And, indeed, if Jesus Christ could not have been happy without redeeming us, how could He have humbled Himself more than He has done, in taking upon Himself our infirmities, the miseries of infancy, the troubles of human life, and a death so barbarous and ignominious?

None but God was capable of loving to so great an excess such wretched sinners as we are, and who are so unworthy of being loved. A devout author says: "If Jesus Christ had permitted us to ask of Him to give us the greatest proof of His love, who would have ventured to ask of Him that He should become a Child like unto us, that He should clothe Himself with all our miseries, and make Himself of all men the most poor, the most despised, and the most ill-treated, even to being put to death by the hands of executioners, and in the greatest torments upon an infamous gibbet, cursed and forsaken by all, even by His own Father, Who abandoned His Son that He might not abandon us in our ruin?"

But that which we should not have had the boldness even to think of, the Son of God has thought of and accomplished.

My Jesus, I should, indeed, do great injustice to Thy mercy and Thy love, if, after Thou hast given me so many proofs of the love Thou bearest me, and the desire Thou hast to save me, I should still distrust Thy mercy and Thy love. My beloved Redeemer, I am a poor sinner; but Thou hast said that Thou didst come to seek sinners: *I am not come to call the just, but sinners.* (Matt. ix. 13). I am a poor infirm creature -- Thou camest to cure the infirm, and Thou didst say: *They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick* (Luke v. 31). I was lost through my sins, but Thou didst come to save the lost: *The son of man is come to save that which was lost* (Matt. xviii. 11). What, then, can I fear, if I am willing to amend my life and to become Thine? I have only myself and my own weakness to fear; but my own weakness and poverty ought to increase my confidence in Thee, Who hast declared Thyself to be the refuge of the destitute: *The Lord is become a refuge for the poor* (Ps. ix. 10).

II.

Even from His childhood He sacrificed Himself for us to sufferings, to opprobrium, and to death: *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). He loved us, and out of love He gave us Himself, in order that we, by offering Him as a Victim to the Father, in satisfaction for our debts, might through His merits obtain from the divine goodness all the graces that we desire; a Victim dearer to the Father than if we offered Him the lives of all men and of all the Angels. Let us therefore continually offer to God the merits of Jesus Christ, and through them let us seek and hope for every good.

I implore this favour of Thee, O my Jesus! Give me confidence in Thy merits, and grant that I may always recommend myself to God through Thy merits. Eternal Father, save me from hell, and first from sin, for the love of Jesus Christ; for the sake of the merits of this Thy Son enlighten my mind to obey Thy will; give me strength against temptations; grant me the gift of Thy holy love; and, above all, I beseech Thee to give me the grace to pray to Thee to help me, for the love of Jesus Christ, Who hast promised that Thou wilt grant to him who prays in His name whatever he asks of Thee. If I continue to pray to Thee in this way, I shall certainly be saved; but if I neglect it, I shall certainly be lost. Most holy Mary, obtain for me this great gift of prayer, and that I may persevere in recommending myself constantly to God, and also to thee, who dost obtain from God whatever thou wilt.

Tuesday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. II.

Consider the happy death of a Religious.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (Apoc. xiv. 13). And who are those *blessed dead who die in the Lord* if not Religious, who, at the end of their lives are found already dead to the world, since they have by their Vows already detached themselves from the world and all its goods. I leave all and choose Thee alone for my Treasure, O most pure Lamb of God and my most ardent Lover!

I.

Consider, my brother, your contentment, if following your Vocation, it will be your good fortune to die in the House of God. The devil will certainly represent to you that if you retire into the House of God, you may perhaps afterwards repent of having left your own house and your own country, and deprived your parents of the advantages which they might have expected from you. But ask yourself: Shall I, at the point of death, be sorry, or shall I rejoice at having followed my resolution? I beseech you therefore to imagine yourself already at the point of death, about to appear before the Tribunal of Jesus Christ. Reflect what, when reduced to that state, you would wish to have done. Perhaps to have pleased your parents, to have worked for your own family and your country, and then to die surrounded by brothers, and nephews, and relatives in your own house with the title of Pastor, Parish Priest, Canon, Bishop or a Minister of State, having done your own will? Or, on the other hand, to die in the House of God, assisted by your good brethren in Religion, who would encourage you in the passage to eternity, after having lived many years in Religion, humble, mortified, poor, far from parents, deprived of your own will and under obedience, and detached from everything in the world -- all which render death sweet and agreeable? "He who has been accustomed to deprive himself of the delights of the world," says St. Bernard. "will not regret having done so when he has to leave it." Pope Honorius II., when dying, wished that he had remained in his monastery, occupied in washing the plates, and had not been Pope. Philip II. wished at his death that he had been a lay-brother in some Religious Order, intent on serving God, and had not been a king. Phillip III, also King of Spain, said when he was dying: "Oh, that I had been in a desert, there to serve God, and that I had never been a monarch! For, had such been the case, I should now appear with more confidence before the Tribunal of Jesus Christ."

O my Lord Jesus Christ! Who, in order to obtain a happy death for me, hast chosen so bitter a death for Thyself -- since Thou hast loved me to such an extent as to have chosen me to follow more closely Thy holy life, to have me thus more intimate-

ly united with Thy loving Heart, bind me, I beseech Thee, wholly to Thee with the sweet cords of Thy love, that I may no more separate myself from Thee. O my beloved Redeemer! I wish to be grateful to Thee, and to correspond with Thy grace, but I fear my weakness may render me unfaithful. O my Jesus! Do not permit this. Let me die rather than abandon Thee, or forget the peculiar affection Thou hast shown me.

II.

When, then, hell tempts you about your Vocation, think of the hour of death, and set before your eyes that all-important moment upon which eternity depends. Thus you will overcome all temptations; you will be faithful to God; and certainly you will not repent of it at the point of death, but will give thanks to the Lord, and die contented. Gerard, brother of St. Bernard, died singing at the very thought of dying in the House of God. Father Suarez, of the Society of Jesus, felt at his death so great consolation and sweetness at dying in Religion that he said: "I never thought it would be so sweet to die." Another good Religious, of the same Society, laughed when at the point of death; and being asked why he laughed, answered: "And why should I not laugh? Has not Jesus Christ Himself promised Paradise to him who leaves everything for His sake? Was it not He Who said: *Everyone that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life-everlasting?* (Matt. xix. 29). I have left all for God; God is faithful, He cannot fail in His promises; and so," he said, "why should I not rejoice and laugh, seeing myself assured of Paradise?" A certain Lay-brother, who died some years ago, was asked, at his death, what he desired most? He answered: "I desire nothing but to die and to be united with God."

Father Januarius Sarnelli, a short time before his death, when conversing with God, was heard saying: "O Lord, Thou knowest that all I have done and all I have thought, has been for Thy glory; now I wish to go to see Thee face to face, if it please Thee so." And then, desiring his departure, he said: "Courage, I wish to enter into a sweet agony." He then began to converse affectionately with God, and shortly after placidly expired. There

was a smile on his lips, and from his body came a sweet odour, which, as many attested, remained for several days in the room in which he had died.*

St. Bernard, speaking of the happy state of Religious, had good reason to exclaim: "O secure life, in which death is expected without fear -- yea, sweetly desired and devoutly accepted!"

I love Thee, O my Saviour! Thou art and shalt always be the only Lord of my heart and of my soul. I leave all and choose Thee alone for my Treasure, O most pure Lamb of God. O my most ardent Lover! *My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands* (Cant. v. 10). Begone, ye creatures, my only Good is my God, He is my Love, my All. I love Thee, O my Jesus! and in loving Thee I will spend the remainder of my life, be it short, or be it long. I embrace Thee, I press Thee to my heart, and I wish to die united to Thee. I wish nothing else. Make me live always burning with Thy love, and when I shall have arrived at the end of my life, make me expire in an ardent act of love towards Thee.

Immaculate Virgin Mary, obtain this grace for me, I hope it from thee.

*The Ven. Father Januarius Sarnelli, C.SS.R. was one of the first companion of St. Alphonsus. He died in the odour of sanctity in the year 1774, and the Cause of his Beatification has been introduced. EDITOR

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

II. THE CALL OF GOD MUST BE OBEYED, AND OBEYED WITHOUT DELAY.

Whenever, therefore, God calls us to a more perfect state, he who does not wish to expose his eternal salvation to great risk must then obey, and obey promptly. Otherwise he will hear from Jesus Christ the reproach of that young man who, when invited to follow Him, said: *I will follow thee, Lord, but let me first take my leave of them that are at my house* (Luke ix. 61). Upon which, Jesus told him he was not fit for Paradise: *No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Ib. 62). The lights which God gives are transient, not permanent gifts. Hence St. Thomas Aquinas says that the call of God to a more perfect state must be obeyed *as quickly as possible - quanto citius*. He pro-

poses in his *Summa* the question whether it would be praiseworthy to enter Religion without having asked the counsel of many and without long deliberation. He answers in the *affirmative*, saying that counsel and deliberation are necessary *in doubtful matters*, but not in this, which is *certainly good*, because Jesus Christ has counselled it in the Gospel, and the Religious State embraces most of the Counsels of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful thing! When there is question of entering Religion to lead a more perfect life, and one more free from the dangers of the world, men of the world will say that it is necessary to deliberate a long time before putting such a resolution into execution, in order to ascertain whether the Vocation comes from God or from the devil! But they do not talk thus when it is a question of accepting a place in the Magistracy, or a Bishopric, and so on, where there are so many dangers of losing one's soul. Then these men of the world do not say that many proofs are required that it is a true call from God.

But the Saints do not speak thus. St. Thomas says that even should a Vocation to Religion come from the devil, we should follow it as a good counsel, though coming from an enemy. St. John Chrysostom, as quoted by the same St. Thomas, says that God, when He gives such Vocations, wills that we should not delay, even for a moment, to follow them. Christ requires from us such an obedience that we should not delay an instant. And why this? Because, as God is much pleased to see a soul prompt in obeying Him, He opens His hand and fills that soul with His blessings. On the contrary, He is displeased with tardiness in obeying Him; He shuts His hand and withdraws His lights. Hence, the soul will follow its Vocation with difficulty, and will easily abandon it. Therefore, St. John Chrysostom says that when the devil cannot bring one to give up his resolution of consecrating himself to God, he at least seeks to make him defer the execution of it, and esteems it a great gain if he can obtain the delay of one day, or even of an hour. And why? Because a day later, or even an hour later, other occasions presenting themselves, it will be less difficult for him to obtain still greater delay, until he who has been called, finding himself more feeble and less assisted by grace, gives way altogether and loses his

Vocation. Therefore, St. Jerome gives to those who are called to quit the world this advice: "Make haste, I beseech you, and *cut* rather than *untie* the cable by which your barque is bound fast to the land." The Saint wished to say that as a man who should find himself in a boat on the point of sinking would seek to cut the rope rather than to untie it, so he who finds himself in the midst of the world ought to seek to get out of it as quickly as possible, in order to free himself from the danger which is so great in the world, of losing his soul.

Let us also hear what St. Francis de Sales writes, concerning Religious Vocation. It will confirm what has already been said, and what will be said hereafter: "To have a sign of a true Vocation, it is not necessary that our constancy be sensible, it suffices if it be in the superior part of our soul. And therefore we must not judge that a Vocation is not true if, before it is actually followed, a person no longer feels those sensible movements which he felt in the beginning, and even should he feel a repugnance and coldness, which sometimes makes him waver, and it appears to him that all is lost. It is enough that the will remains constant in not abandoning the divine call, and that there remains some affection for this call. To know whether God wills one to become a Religious, one ought not to expect that God Himself should speak or send an Angel from Heaven to signify His will. And as little necessary is it that ten or twelve Doctors should examine whether the Vocation is to be followed or not. But it is necessary to correspond with the first movement of the inspiration, and to cultivate it, and then not to grow weary if disgust or coldness should follow; for, in acting thus, God will not fail to make all succeed to His glory.

Nor ought we to care much from what quarter the first movement comes. The Lord uses many means to call His servants. Sometimes He makes use of a sermon, at other times of the reading of good books. Some, as St. Anthony and St. Francis, have been called by hearing the words of the Gospel; others by means of afflictions and troubles that came upon them in the world, and which suggested to them the motive for leaving it. These persons, although they come to God only because they are disgusted with the world or have lost its favour, never-

theless, because they give themselves to Him with their whole will, become sometimes greater Saints than those who entered Religion with a more apparent Vocation. Father Platus relates that a nobleman, riding one day on a fine horse, and striving to make a great display in order to please some ladies whom he saw, was thrown from the horse into the mire from which he rose besmeared and covered with mud. He was so full of confusion at this accident that at the same moment he resolved to become a Religious, saying: "Treacherous world, thou hast mocked me, but I will mock thee. Thou hast played me a game, I will play thee another; for I will have no more peace with thee, and from this hour I resolve to forsake thee and to become a friar." And, in fact, he became a Religious and lived a holy life in Religion.

Evening Meditation

JESUS, THE MAN OF SORROWS FROM THE WOMB OF HIS MOTHER

I.

A man of sorrows, acquainted with infirmity. (Is.liiii. 8).

Thus does the Prophet Isaias designate our Lord Jesus Christ -- *the man of sorrows*. Yes, because this Man was created on purpose to suffer, and from His infancy began to endure the greatest sorrows that any man had ever suffered. The first man, Adam, enjoyed for some time upon this earth the delights of the earthly Paradise; but the second Adam, Jesus Christ, did not pass a moment of His life without sorrows and anguish; for even as a Child He was afflicted by the foresight of all the sufferings and ignominy that He would have to endure during His life, and especially at His death, when He was to close that life immersed in a tempest of sorrow and opprobrium, as David had predicted: *I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me* (Ps.lxviii. 3).

My sweetest Redeemer, when shall I begin to be grateful to Thy infinite goodness? When shall I begin to acknowledge the love that Thou hast borne me, and the sorrows Thou hast endured for me? Hitherto, instead of love and gratitude, I have returned Thee offences and contempt; shall I then continue to live always ungrateful to Thee, my God, Who hast spared nothing to acquire my love? No, my Jesus, it shall not be so. During

the days that may yet remain to me I will be grateful to Thee; and Thou wilt, I trust, help me to be so. If I have offended Thee, Thy sufferings and Thy death are my hope. Thou hast promised to forgive the penitent. I repent with my whole soul of having despised Thee. Fulfil, therefore, Thy promise, my Beloved, and forgive me. O dearest Infant, I behold Thee in the manger already nailed to Thy Cross, which is constantly present to Thee, and which Thou dost already accept for me. O my crucified Babe, I thank Thee for it, and I love Thee.

II.

Even from the womb of Mary, Jesus Christ accepted obediently the sacrifice which His Father had desired Him to make, even His Passion and Death: *Becoming obedient unto death* (Phil. ii. 8). So that even from the womb of Mary He foresaw the scourges and presented to them His flesh; He foresaw the thorns and presented to them His head; He foresaw the blows and presented to them His cheeks; He foresaw the nails and presented to them His hands and feet; He foresaw the Cross and offered His life. Hence it is true that even from His earliest infancy our Blessed Redeemer, every moment of His life, suffered a continual martyrdom; and He offered it every moment for us to His Eternal Father.

But what afflicted Him most was the sight of the sins which men would commit even after this painful Redemption. By His divine light He well knew the malice of every sin, and therefore did He come into the world to do away with all sins; but when He saw the immense number which would be committed, the sorrow that the Heart of Jesus felt was greater than all the sorrows that all men ever suffered or ever will suffer upon earth.

Stretched upon this straw, O my Jesus, suffering already for me, and preparing Thyself even now to die for the love of me, Thou dost command and invite me to love Thee: *Love the Lord thy God*. And I desire nothing more than to love Thee. Since, therefore, Thou wilt that I should love Thee, give me all the love that Thou requirest of me; love for Thee is Thy gift, and the very greatest gift Thou canst make to a soul. Accept, O my Jesus! for Thy lover a sinner Who has so greatly offended Thee. Thou didst come from Heaven to seek the lost sheep; do Thou, there-

fore, seek me, and I will seek none other but Thee. Thou desirest my soul, and my soul desires nothing but Thee. Thou lovest him that loves Thee, and sayest: *I love those that love me* (Prov. viii. 17). I love Thee, do Thou also love me; and if Thou lovest me, bind me to Thy love; but bind me so that I may never again be able to disengage myself from Thee. Mary, my Mother, do thou help me. Let it be thy glory also to see thy Son loved by a miserable sinner, who has hitherto so greatly offended Him.

Wednesday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. III

Consider the account which he will have to render to Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment who does not follow his Vocation.

The grace of Vocation is a very rare grace which God grants only to a few. But the greater the grace, the greater will be the indignation of the Lord against him who does not correspond with it. He is the Lord. When He calls He wishes to be obeyed, and obeyed promptly.

I.

The grace of Vocation to the Religious state is not an ordinary grace; it is a very rare one, which God grants only to a few. *He hath not done so to every nation* (Ps. cxlvii. 20). Oh, how much greater is this grace, to be called to a perfect life, and to become one of the household of God, than if one were called to be the king of any kingdom on this earth! For what comparison can there be between a temporal kingdom on this earth and the eternal kingdom of Heaven?

But the greater the grace, the greater will be the indignation of the Lord against him who has not corresponded with it, and the more rigorous will be His judgment on the day of account. If a king were to call a poor shepherd to his royal palace, to serve him among the noblemen of his court, what would not be the indignation of the king were he to refuse such a favour through unwillingness to leave his poor little hut and his little flock? God knows well the value of His graces, and therefore He chastises with severity those who despise them. He is the Lord; when He calls He wishes to be obeyed, and obeyed promptly.

O Lord, Thou hast shown me such an excess of bounty as to choose me from among so many others, to serve Thee in Thy own House with Thy most beloved servants. I know how great is that grace, and how unworthy of it I have been. Behold, I am now willing to correspond to so great a love. I will obey Thee. Since Thou hast been so liberal towards me as to call me when I did not seek Thee, and when I was so ungrateful, permit not that I should offer Thee that greater excess of ingratitude as to embrace again my enemy, the world, in which heretofore I have so oftentimes forfeited Thy grace and my eternal salvation, and thus to forsake Thee, Who hast shed Thy Blood and given Thy life for my sake. Since Thou hast called me, give me also the strength to correspond to the call. Already have I promised to obey Thee. I promise it again, but without the grace of perseverance I cannot be faithful to Thee. This perseverance I ask from Thee, and through Thy own merits it is that I wish it and hope to obtain it.

II.

When, therefore, by His inspiration, God calls a soul to a perfect life, if it does not correspond He deprives it of His light, and abandons it to its own darkness. Oh, how many poor souls shall we see among the reprobate on the Day of Judgment for this very reason, that they were called and would not correspond!

Give thanks, then, to the Lord, Who has invited you to follow Him; but if you do not correspond, tremble! Since God calls you to serve near His Person, it is a sign that He wishes to save you. But He will have you to be saved in that path only which He indicates to you and has chosen for you. If you wish to save yourself on a road of your own choosing, there is great danger that you will not be saved at all; for if you remain in the world, when God wishes you to be a Religious, He will not give you those efficacious helps prepared for you had you lived in His House, and without those you will not save yourself. *My sheep hear my voice* (Jo. x. 27). He who will not obey the voice of God shows that he is not, and will not be, one of His sheep, but in the Valley of Josaphat, he will be condemned with the goats.

Give me courage, O my Jesus, to vanquish the passions of

the flesh, through which the devil seeks to induce me to betray Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus! To Thee I consecrate myself entirely. I am already Thine, I will be always Thine. O Mary, my Mother and my hope, thou art the Mother of perseverance. This grace is only dispensed through thy hands; do thou obtain it for me. In thee do I confide.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

III. THE MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED FOR PRESERVING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

He, then, who wishes to be faithful to the Divine call, ought not only to resolve to follow it, but to follow it promptly, as soon as ever he can, if he does not wish to expose himself to the evident danger of losing his Vocation. Should he, of necessity, be forced to wait, he ought to use all diligence to preserve it, as the most precious jewel he could possess.

The means to preserve one's Vocation are three in number:

1. *Secrecy*; 2. *Prayer*; 3. *Recollection*.

A. *Secrecy*

Generally speaking, he must keep his Vocation secret from everybody except his spiritual Father, because, commonly, people of the world scruple not to say to young people who are called to the Religious state, that one may serve God *anywhere*, and therefore *in the world* also. And the wonder is that such propositions come sometimes out of the mouths of priests, and even of Religious, but of such only who have become Religious without a Vocation, or do not know what Vocation means. Most certainly he who is not called to the Religious state may serve God in every place, but not so he who is called to Religion, and then from his own inclination wishes to remain in the world; such a one, as I have said before, can with difficulty lead a good life, and serve God.

It is especially necessary not to speak about Vocation to parents.

It was, indeed, the opinion of Luther, as Bellarmine relates, that children entering Religion without the consent of their parents commit a sin. For, said he, children are bound to obey their parents in all things. But this opinion has generally been

rejected by Councils and the Holy Fathers. The Tenth Council of Toledo expressly declares that it is lawful for children to become Religious without the consent of their parents, provided they have attained the age of fourteen years. Here are the words of the Council: "It shall not be lawful for parents to put their children in a Religious Order after they have attained their fourteenth year. After this age, it shall be lawful for children to take upon themselves the yoke of Religious observance, whether it be with the consent of their parents, or only the wish of their own hearts." The same is taught by St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and others, with St. John Chrysostom who writes: "When parents stand in the way of spiritual good, they ought not even to be recognised."

Some Doctors hold that when a child called by God to the Religious state can easily and securely obtain the consent of his parents, without any danger of their hindering him from following his Vocation, it is becoming that he should seek their blessing. This doctrine may be held speculatively, but not in practice, because in practice such a danger always exists. Hence it is well to discuss this point fully, in order to do away with the pharisaical scruples which some entertain.

It is certain that in the choice of a state of life, children are not bound to obey their parents. This is the common teaching of Doctors, with St. Thomas, who says: "Servants are not bound to obey their masters, or children their parents, with regard to contracting matrimony, preserving virginity, and such like things." Nevertheless, with regard to the state of marriage, Father Pinamonti, in his Treatise on *Religious Vocation*, rightly holds the opinion of Sanchez, Comminchio, and others, who teach that a child is bound to take counsel of his parents, because in such matters they have more experience than the young, and generally do their duty. But, speaking of Religious Vocation, he adds that a child is not bound at all to take counsel of his parents, because in this matter they have no experience, and through interest, are commonly changed into enemies, as St. Thomas also remarks when speaking of Religious Vocation. "Frequently," he says "our friends according to the flesh are opposed to our spiritual good." For fathers often prefer that their children should

be damned with them rather than be saved away from them. Hence, St. Bernard exclaims: "O hard father, O cruel mother, whose consolation is the death of their son; who wish rather that I perish with them than reign without them!"

God, says a grave author, Porrecta, when He calls a person to a perfect life wishes him to forget his father, saying: *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house* (Ps. xlv. 11). By this, then, he adds, the Lord certainly admonishes us that he who is called ought by no means to allow the counsel of parents to intervene. "If God will have a soul, who is called by Him, to forget his father and his father's house, without doubt He suggests by this, that he who is called to the Religious state ought not, before he follows the call, to interpose the counsel of the carnal friends of his household."

St. Cyril, commenting on what Jesus Christ said to the youth mentioned above: *No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke ix. 61), says that he who asks for time to confer with his parents in reference to his Vocation is exactly the one who is declared by our Lord to be unfit for Heaven. "He looks back who seeks for delay that he may be able to confer with his parents." Hence, St. Thomas absolutely advises those who are called to Religion, to abstain from deliberating on their Vocation with their relatives: "From this deliberation, the relatives of the flesh are before all to be excluded; for it is said: *Treat thy cause with thy friend* (Prov. xxv. 9). Now our relatives are in this affair not our friends, but our enemies, according to the saying of our Lord: *A man's enemies are they of his own household* (Matt. x. 36)."

Evening Meditation

GRANDEUR OF THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

I.

And the Word was made flesh (St. John i. 14).

Our Lord sent St. Augustine to write upon the heart of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi the words, *And the Word was made flesh*. Oh, let us also pray the Lord to enlighten our minds, and to make us understand what an excess and what a miracle of love this is: that the Eternal Word, the Son of God, should have become Man for the love of us.

The Holy Church is struck with awe at the contemplation of this great Mystery: *I considered thy works and was afraid*. If God had created a thousand other worlds, a thousand times greater and more beautiful than the present, it is certain that this work would be infinitely less grand than the Incarnation of the Word: *He hath showed might in his arm* (Luke i. 51). To execute the great work of the Incarnation, it required all the omnipotence and infinite wisdom of God, in order to unite human nature to a Divine Person, and that a Divine Person should so humble Himself as to take upon Himself human nature. Thus God became Man, and Man became God; and hence, the Divinity of the Word being united to the soul and body of Jesus Christ, all the actions of this Man-God became divine: His prayers were divine, His sufferings divine, His infant cries divine, His tears divine, His steps divine, His members divine, His very Blood divine, which became, as it were, a fountain of health to wash out all our sins, and a Sacrifice of infinite value to appease the justice of the Father, Who was justly angered with men.

O Soul, O Body, O Blood of my Jesus! I adore you and thank you; you are my hope; you are the price paid to save me from hell, which I have so often merited. O my God! What a miserable and hopeless life would await me in eternity, if Thou, my Redeemer, hadst not thought of saving me by Thy sufferings and death! But how is it that souls, redeemed by Thee with so much love, knowing all this, can live without loving Thee, and can despise the grace which Thou hast acquired for them with so much suffering? And did not I also know all this? How, then, could I have offended Thee, and offend Thee so often? But, I repeat it, Thy Blood is my hope. I acknowledge, my Saviour, the great injuries that I have done Thee. Oh that I had rather died a thousand times! Oh, that I had always loved Thee!

II.

And who, then, are these men? Miserable, ungrateful, and rebellious creatures! And yet for these God becomes Man; subjects Himself to human miseries; suffers and dies to save these unworthy sinners; *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8). O holy Faith! If Faith did not assure us of it, who would believe that a God of infinite

majesty should abase Himself so far as to become a worm like us, in order to save us at the cost of so much suffering and disgrace, and of so cruel and shameful a death?

"O grace! O power of love!" cries out St. Bernard. O grace, which men could not even have imagined, if God Himself had not thought of granting it to us! O mercy! O infinite charity, worthy only of an infinite Bounty!

By Thy grace I now feel great sorrow for the offences I have committed against Thee; I feel within me an ardent desire of loving Thee; I feel fully resolved to lose everything rather than Thy friendship; I feel a love towards Thee that makes me abhor everything that displeases Thee. And this sorrow, this desire, this resolution, and this love, who is it that gives them to me? It is Thou, O Lord, in Thy great mercy. Therefore, my Jesus, this is a proof that Thou hast pardoned me; it is a proof that now Thou lovest me, and that Thou wilt save me at all costs to be saved; Thou wilt save that I should be saved, and I will save myself principally to give Thee pleasure. Thou lovest me, and I also love Thee; but my love is little indeed. Oh, give me more love; Thou deservest more love from me, for I have received from Thee more special favours than others: I pray Thee do Thou increase the flames of my love.

Most holy Mary, obtain for me that the love of Jesus may consume and destroy in me every affection that has not God for its object. Thou dost listen to the prayers of all that call on thee; listen to me also and obtain for me love and perseverance.

Thursday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. IV.

Consider the torments of the soul of one in hell who lost his Vocation.

He will say: O fool that I was! I might have become a great Saint! And if I had obeyed the Call of God I should certainly have become a Saint, and now I am damned without remedy! Make your choice, for God leaves it in your own hands, to be a great king in Paradise, or a reprobate in hell.

I.

The remorse for having lost, by one's own fault, some great good, or for having been the voluntary cause of some great evil to ourselves, is so great that even in this life it is an insupportable torment. But what torment will that youth, called by the singular favour of God to the Religious state, feel in hell when he perceives that if he had obeyed God he would have attained a high place in Paradise, and sees himself nevertheless confined in that prison of torments, without hope of remedy for this his eternal ruin! *Their worm dieth not* (Mark ix. 43).

This will be that worm, which, living always, will always gnaw his heart by continual remorse. Fool that I was! he will say, I might have become a great Saint. And if I had obeyed, I should certainly have become a Saint; and now I am damned without remedy.

Unfortunate man! For his greater torment, on the Day of Judgment, he will see and recognise at the right hand of God and crowned as Saints, those who followed their Vocation, and, leaving the world, retired to the House of God, to which he also had been called. He shall see himself separated from the company of the Blessed, and placed in the midst of that innumerable and miserable crew of the damned, for his disobedience to the voice of God.

No, my God, permit me not to disobey Thee and to be unfaithful. I see Thy goodness, and thank Thee, for instead of casting me away from Thy face, and banishing me to hell, as I have so often deserved, Thou callest me to become a Saint, and preparest for me a high place in Paradise. I see that I should deserve a double torment, should I not correspond with this grace -- a grace not given to all. I will obey Thee. Behold, I am Thine, and always will be Thine. I embrace with joy all the pains and discomforts of the Religious life, to which Thou invitest me. And what are these pains in comparison with the eternal pains, which I have deserved? I was entirely lost through my sins; now I give myself entirely to Thee. Dispose of me and my life as Thou pleasest.

II.

We know well, as we have considered above, that to this most unhappy lot he exposes himself, who, in order to follow his

own caprice, turns a deaf ear to the call of God. Therefore, my brother, you who have already been called to become a Saint in the House of God, consider that you will expose yourself to a great danger should you lose your Vocation through your own fault. Consider that this very Vocation which God in His Sovereign Bounty has given you, in order, as it were, to take you out from among the crowd, and place you among the chosen princes of His Paradise, will, through your own fault, should you be unfaithful to it, become a special hell for you. Make your own choice, then, for now God leaves it in your own hands, either to be a great king in Paradise, or a reprobate in hell, more full of despair than the rest.

Accept, O Lord, of one already at the gates of hell, as I have been, to serve Thee and love Thee in this life and in the next. I will love Thee as much as I have deserved to be doomed to hate Thee in hell, O God, worthy of an infinite love! O my Jesus Thou hast broken those chains by which the world held me captive; Thou hast delivered me from the servitude of my enemies. I will love Thee much, then, O my Love! and for the love I bear thee, I will always serve Thee and obey Thee. I will always thank thee, O Mary, my advocate, who hast obtained this mercy for me. Help me, and suffer me not to be ungrateful to that God Who has loved me so much. Obtain for me that I may die rather than be unfaithful to so great a grace. This is my hope.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

IV. THE MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED TO PRESERVE A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Secrecy (continued)

If, then, it would be a great mistake to ask the *advice* of parents in following one's Vocation, it would be a greater error still to ask their *permission* to follow it, and wait for their consent; for there would be an evident danger of losing the Vocation in so doing when there is a likely suspicion that parents would exert themselves to prevent it. Thus St. Thomas Aquinas acted, and St. Francis Xavier, St. Philip Neri and St. Louis Bertrand. And we know that the Lord approved, even by miracles, of their glorious flight.

St. Peter of Alcantara, when he went to the monastery to become a Religious, and was fleeing from the house of his mother under whose obedience he had lived since the death of his father, found himself prevented by a wide river from advancing any further. He recommended himself to God, and at the same instant saw himself transported to the other side.

In like manner, when St. Stanislaus Kotska fled from home, without the permission of his father, his brother set out after him in great haste in a carriage, but having almost overtaken him, the horses, in spite of all the violence used against them, would not advance a step further, till turning back towards the city, they began to travel at full speed.

In like manner the Blessed Oringa of Valdarno, in Tuscany, being promised in marriage to a young man, fled from the house of her parents in order to consecrate herself to God; but she was stopped by the river Arno. After a short prayer she saw it divide and form, as it were, two walls of crystal, to let her pass through with dry feet.

Therefore, my very beloved brother, if you are called by God to leave the world, be very careful not to make your resolution known to your parents, and, content to be thus blessed by God, seek to execute it as promptly as you can, and without their knowledge, if you would not expose yourself to the great danger of losing your Vocation. For, generally speaking, relatives, as has been said before, especially fathers and mothers, oppose the execution of such resolutions; and although they may be endowed with piety, nevertheless, interest and passion render them so blind that under various pretexts they scruple not to thwart with all their might the Vocation of their children.

We read in the Life of Father Paul Segneri, the Younger, that his mother, though a matron much given to prayer, left, nevertheless, no means untried to prevent her son from entering the Religious state to which he was called. We also read in the life of Mgr. Cavalieri, Bishop of Troja, that his father, although a man of great piety, used every means to prevent his son from entering the Congregation of Pious Workers (which, notwithstanding, he afterwards did), and even went so far as to bring against him a lawsuit in the Ecclesiastical Court. And how many other fathers,

even though they were men of piety and prayer, have not in such cases been seen to change, and to become possessed, as it were, by the devil! For under no other circumstances does hell seem to employ more formidable arms than when there is a question of preventing those who are called to the Religious state from executing their resolution.*

For this reason be also very careful not to communicate your design to your friends, who will not scruple to dissuade you from it, or at least, to divulge the secret, so that the knowledge of it will easily come to the ears of your parents.

*St. Alphonsus had himself to suffer great opposition in following his Vocation. No one opposed him more than his own father. The mere thought of the separation broke the father's heart. One afternoon he entered the room of Alphonsus and taking him in his arms, cried out with sobs: My son, my son, why will you abandon me? What have I done that you should give me so much pain? Why should I be treated so? Have pity on me, and do not abandon me!" This struggle with a father's love lasted three long hours. Father and child were torn with grief. Alphonsus conquered; but he could never afterwards think of that struggle of three hours without a shudder. --EDITOR.

Evening Meditation

JESUS SUFFERS DURING HIS WHOLE LIFE.

I.

My sorrow is continually before me (Ps. xxxvii. 18).

Consider that all the sufferings and ignominy that Jesus endured in His life and death were present to Him from the first moment of His life: *My sorrow is continually before me*; and even from His childhood He began to offer them in satisfaction for our sins, beginning even then to fulfil His office as Redeemer. He revealed to one of His servants that from the commencement of His life even unto His death He suffered continually; and suffered so much for each of our sins that if He had had as many lives as there are men, He would as many times have died of sorrow, if God had not preserved His life that He might suffer more.

Oh, what a martyrdom did not the loving Heart of Jesus constantly endure in beholding all the sins of men! He beheld every single fault. Even whilst He was in the womb of Mary

every particular sin passed in review before Jesus, and each sin afflicted Him immeasurably. St. Thomas says that this sorrow which Jesus Christ felt at the knowledge of the injury done to His Father, and of the evil that sin would occasion to the souls that He loved, surpassed the sorrows of all the contrite sinners that ever existed, even of those who died of pure sorrow; because no sinner ever loved God and his own soul as much as Jesus loved His Father and our souls.

Behold, my Jesus, at Thy feet, the ungrateful sinner, the persecutor who kept Thee in continual affliction during all Thy life. But I will say to Thee with Isaias: *But thou hast delivered my soul that it should not perish; thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back* (Is. xxxviii. 17). I have offended Thee. I have wounded Thee by so many sins; but Thou hast not refused to take upon Thy shoulders all my offences. I have voluntarily cast my soul into the fire of hell every time that I have consented to offend Thee gravely; and Thou, at the cost of Thy own Blood, hast continually liberated me and prevented me from being entirely lost. My beloved Redeemer, I thank Thee.

II.

Wherefore that agony which our Redeemer suffered in the Garden at the sight of our sins was endured by Him even from His Mother's womb: *I am poor, and in labours from my youth* (Ps. lxxxvii. 16). Thus through the mouth of David did our Saviour prophesy of Himself that all His life would be a continual suffering. From this St. John Chrysostom deduces that we ought not to afflict ourselves for anything but for sin alone; and that since Jesus was afflicted all His life long on account of our sins, so we who have committed them ought to feel a continual sorrow for them, remembering that we have offended God Who has loved us so much. St. Margaret of Cortona never ceased to shed tears for her sins. One day her confessor said to her: "Margaret, no more tears! It is enough -- Our Lord has already forgiven thee." "What!" answered the Saint, "how can my tears and my sorrows suffice for the sins for which my Jesus was afflicted all His life long!"

O my Jesus, I could wish to die of sorrow when I think how I have abused Thy infinite goodness; forgive me, my Love, and

come and take entire possession of my heart. Thou hast said that Thou wouldst not disdain to enter into the abode of him that opens to Thee, and to remain in his company: *If any man shall open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him* (Apoc. iii. 20). If I have hitherto driven Thee away from me, I now love Thee and desire nothing but Thy favour. Behold, the door is open, enter Thou into my heart, but enter never to depart from it again. I am poor; but if Thou enter Thou wilt make me rich. I shall always be rich so long as I possess Thee, the Sovereign Good. O Queen of Heaven, sorrowful Mother of this suffering Son, I also have been a cause of sorrow to thee, because thou hast participated, in great measure, in the sufferings of Jesus. My Mother, do thou also forgive me, and obtain for me the grace to be faithful to thee, now that I hope my Jesus has returned into my soul.

Friday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. V.

Consider the immense glory that Religious will enjoy in Heaven.

He will render to everyone according to his works (Matt. xvi. 27).

From this you can judge how exceeding great will be the reward that God will give in Heaven to good Religious on account of the great merits they acquire every day. *Going, they went and wept casting their seeds; but coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves* (Ps. cxxv. 6, 7).

I.

Consider, in the first place, what St. Bernard says: that it is difficult for Religious who die in the Religious state to be damned. "From the cell to heaven the way is easy. One scarcely ever descends from the cell into hell." The reason the Saint adduces is: "because one scarcely ever perseveres in it until death unless he be predestinated." For it is with difficulty a Religious perseveres until death, if he be not of the number of the Elect of Paradise. Therefore, St. Laurence Justinian called the Religious state the gate of Paradise: "Of that heavenly city this is the gate." And he said that, therefore, "Religious have a great sign of predestination."

Consider, moreover, that the reward of Heaven, as the Apostle says, is *a crown of justice* (2 Tim. iv. 8). Wherefore, God, though He rewards us for our works more abundantly than we deserve, rewards us nevertheless in proportion to the works we have done. *He will render to everyone according to his works.* From this you can judge how exceedingly great will be the reward which God will give in Heaven to good Religious, in consideration of the great merits they daily acquire.

The Religious gives to God all his earthly goods and is content to be entirely poor, without possessing anything. The Religious renounces all attachment to his parents, friends, and country, in order to unite himself more closely to God. The Religious continually mortifies himself in many things which he would enjoy in the world. The Religious, finally, gives to God his whole self, by giving him his will through the Vow of Obedience.

The dearest thing that we have to give is our own will, and what God, of all other things, requires of us most is the heart, that is to say, the will. *My son, give me thy heart.* He who serves God *in the world* will give Him his possessions, but not himself; he will give Him a part and not the whole, for he will give Him indeed his goods by alms-deeds, his food by fasting, his blood by disciplines, etc. But he will always reserve for himself his own will, fasting when he pleases, praying when he likes. But the Religious, giving Him his own will, gives himself and gives all; gives not only the fruits of the tree, but the whole tree itself. Whence he may then truly say to Him: O Lord! having given Thee my will, I have nothing more to give Thee.

Is it possible, O my God and my true Lover! that Thou so much desirest my good, and to be loved by me, and that I, miserable that I am, desire so little to love and to please Thee? For what end hast Thou favoured me with so many graces, and taken me out of the *world*? O my Jesus! I understand Thee. Thou lovest me much, Thou wilt have me love Thee much, and be all Thine, in this life and in the next. Thou wishest that my love should not be divided with creatures, but wilt have it be wholly for Thyself, the only Good, the only lovely One, and worthy of infinite love. Ah! my Lord, my Treasure, my Love, my All! Yes, I pant and truly desire to love Thee, and to love no other but

Thee.

II.

And, therefore, in all that the Religious does through Obedience, he is sure to do the will of God perfectly, and merits by all he does, not only when he prays, when he hears confessions, when he preaches or fasts, or practises other mortifications, but also when he takes his food; when he sweeps his room, when he makes his bed, when he takes his rest, when he recreates himself; for, doing all this through Obedience, in all he does the will of God. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said that everything done through Obedience is a prayer. Hence, St. Anselm, speaking of those who love Obedience, asserted that all that Religious do is meritorious for them. St. Aloysius Gonzaga said that in Religion one travels, as it were, in a vessel in which even he who does not labour advances.

Oh, how much more will a Religious gain in one month by observing his Rule than a secular, with all his penance and prayers, in a year! Of that disciple of Dorotheus called Dositheus, it was revealed that for the five years he had lived under Obedience, there was given to him in Heaven the glory of St. Paul the Hermit, and of St. Anthony the Abbot, both of whom had, for so many years, lived in the desert. Religious, it is true, have to suffer the inconvenience of regular observance: *Going, they went and wept*. But when they are called to the other life they will go to Heaven, *and ... with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves* (Ps. cxxv. 6, 7). Whence they will sing: *The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places, for my inheritance is goodly to me* (Ps. xv. 6). These bonds which have bound me to the Lord have become for me exceedingly precious, and the glory they have acquired for me is exceedingly great.

I thank Thee, Jesus, for this desire Thou hast given me; preserve it in me, always increase it in me, and grant that I may please Thee, and love Thee on this earth as Thou desirest, so that I may come hereafter to love Thee face to face, with all my strength in Paradise. Behold, this is all that I ask from Thee. Thee will I love, O my God! I will love Thee; and for Thy love I offer myself to suffer every pain. I will become a Saint, not that I may enjoy great delight in Heaven, but to please Thee much,

O my beloved Lord! and to love Thee much forever. Graciously hear me, O Eternal Father for the love of Jesus Christ.

My Mother Mary, for the love of this thy Son, help thou me. Thou art my hope; from thee I hope for every good.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

V. THE MEANS TO BE EMPLOYED FOR PRESERVING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

B. Prayer

In the second place, it is necessary to remember that these Vocations are only preserved by prayer; he who gives up prayer will certainly lose his Vocation. It is necessary to pray, and to pray much; and, therefore, let him who feels himself called, not omit to make every morning after rising, an hour's Meditation, or at least one for half an hour, in his own room, if he can do so without molestation, and, if not, in the church; and likewise for half an hour in the evening.

Let him not omit also to make every day a Visit to the Most Holy Sacrament, and to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance in his Vocation, and let him not omit to receive Holy Communion three times, or at least, twice a week.

His Meditations ought almost always to be on his Vocation, considering how great a favour he has received from God, in being thus called by Him; how much more easily he will secure his eternal salvation, if he be faithful in following it; and on the contrary, to how great a danger of being lost he exposes himself, if he be unfaithful. Let him then especially keep before his eyes the hour of death, and consider the contentment that he will then feel if he shall have obeyed God, and the pains and the remorse he will experience if he should die in the world. To this end I shall add some *Considerations* on which he may make his Meditation.*

It is, moreover, necessary that all his prayers to Jesus and Mary, and especially those after Communion and in the Visits, be directed to obtain perseverance. In these prayers and Communions let him always renew the offering of himself to God, saying: "Behold, O Lord! I am no longer mine own. I am Thine.

Already have I given myself to Thee, and now I renew this my offering of my whole self. Accept of me and give me strength to be faithful to Thee and to retire as quickly as possible into Thy House."

*These are the *Considerations* that commenced on the Second Monday of Advent, and are being given as Morning Meditations.

C. Recollection

In the third place, it is necessary to be recollected. This will not be possible unless he withdraws from worldly reunions and secular amusements. And, indeed, as long as we are in the world, what suffices to cause the loss of Vocation? A mere nothing. One day of dissipation, a word from a friend, a passion not mortified, a little attachment, some groundless fear, some slothfulness not overcome -- any one of these suffices to bring to nought all one's good resolutions of retiring from the world, and of giving oneself entirely to God. Wherefore, he who is called to Religion ought to keep perfectly recollected, detaching himself from everything of this world. His occupation while waiting should be prayer and frequenting the Sacraments; and he should pass his time at home or in church. Let him who will not act thus, but who distracts himself by pastimes, be persuaded that he will undoubtedly lose his Vocation. He will, indeed, feel remorse for not following his Vocation, but he certainly will *not* follow it. Oh, how many by neglecting these precautions have lost their Vocation, and afterwards their souls!

A PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE (To be said often and fervently)

My Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst choose for Thyself the most bitter death of the Cross that I might die a happy death -- ah, since Thou hast so loved me as to call me out of the world to follow in Thy footsteps and be thus always united to Thy loving Heart, bind me, I beseech Thee, dear Jesus, with the sweet chain of Thy love wholly to Thyself that I may never more be separated from Thee. O my beloved Redeemer, I do desire to be grateful, and faithful to Thy grace and to my Vocation, but I fear lest, through my own weakness, I should be faithless. My Jesus, do not allow that it should be so. No! Let me die rather than that

I should ever abandon Thee. May I never forget the special love which Thou hast shown me. I love Thee, my dear Saviour. Thou art now and wilt ever be the only Master of my heart and soul. I quit all and choose Thee alone for my only Treasure.

Go, creatures -- go far away! My God is my only Good. He is my Love. He is my All! My Jesus, I love Thee, and in loving Thee I wish to spend my whole life, be it long or short. I embrace Thee. I clasp Thee to my heart. In Thy loving arms I wish to die. This grace I ask for, and I care for nothing else.

Make me live always burning with Thy love, and when my end shall have at length come, let me give forth my last breath in an ardent act of love to Thee. O Mary Immaculate, do thou obtain for me this grace. My hope is in thy powerful intercession. Help me to forsake the world. Come to my rescue now. Succour me and obtain for me the grace to overcome myself and to become a Saint. Amen.

Evening Meditation

JESUS WISHED TO SUFFER SO MUCH IN ORDER TO GAIN OUR HEARTS.

I.

I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised and how am I straitened until it be accomplished? (Luke xii. 50).

Consider how Jesus suffered even from the first moment of His life, and all for love of us. During the whole of His life He had no other interest, after the glory of God, than our salvation. He, as the Son of God, had no need to suffer in order to deserve Paradise; but whatever He suffered of pain, of poverty, of ignominy, He applied it all towards meriting for us eternal salvation. And even though He could have saved us without suffering, yet He chose to embrace a life of nothing but sufferings, poor, despised, and deprived of every comfort, with a death the most desolate and bitter that was ever endured by any Martyr or penitent, only to make us understand the greatness of the love He bore us, and to gain our affections.

He lived thirty-three years, and He lived sighing for the hour in which He was to sacrifice His life, which He desired to offer up to obtain for us divine grace and eternal glory, in order that He might have us with Him forever in Paradise.

My beloved Redeemer, I am also one of those ungrateful wretches who have repaid Thy immense love, Thy sorrows, and Thy death, with offences and contempt. O my dearest Jesus! how is it possible that, seeing as Thou didst the ingratitude that I should show Thee for all Thy mercies, Thou couldst yet love me so much, and resolve to endure so much contempt and suffering for me! But I will not despair. The evil is already done. Give me, therefore, O my Saviour, that sorrow which Thou hast merited for me by Thy tears; but let it be a sorrow equal to my iniquities. O loving Heart of my Saviour, once so afflicted and desolate for my sake, and now all burning with love for me, I beseech Thee change my heart, give me a heart that will make reparation for the offences I have committed against Thee -- a love that will equal my ingratitude!

II.

It was this desire which made Jesus say: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?* He desired to be baptised with His own Blood, not to wash out His own sins, since He was innocent and holy, but the sins of men whom He loved so much: *He loved us, and washed us in his own blood* (Apoc. i. 5). Oh, excess of the love of God, which all the men and Angels that ever existed will never succeed in understanding or praising as it deserves.

St. Bonaventure weeps at seeing the great ingratitude of men for so great a love: "It is a cause for wonder that the hearts of men do not break for love of Thee." It is a marvel, says the Saint, to see a God endure such sufferings, shedding tears in a stable, poor in a workshop, languishing on a Cross; in short afflicted and tormented; the whole of His life for the love of men; and then to see these men, who not only do not burn with love towards such a loving God, but even have the boldness to despise His love and His grace. O Lord, how is it possible to conceive that a God should have given Himself up to so much suffering for men, and yet that there should be men who can offend, and not love this merciful God!

I give Thee thanks, my Saviour, because I see that Thy mercy has already changed my heart. I hate, above every evil, the insults I have offered Thee; I detest them, I abhor them. I now

esteem Thy friendship above all the riches and kingdoms of the world. I desire to please Thee as much as it is possible for me; I love Thee, Who art infinitely amiable; but I see that my love is too feeble. Do Thou increase the flame, give me more love. Thy love for me ought to be responded to by a greater degree of love in me, who have so much offended Thee, and who, instead of chastisement, have received so many special favours from Thee. O Sovereign Good, permit me not to be any longer ungrateful for all the favours Thou hast bestowed upon me. I will say with St. Francis: "May I die, Lord, for the love of Thy love, Who for the love of my love didst deign to die!" Mary, my hope, help me; pray to Jesus for me!

Saturday--Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

*THE OFFERING MARY MADE OF HERSELF TO GOD
WAS PROMPT AND WITHOUT DELAY.*

Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come! (Cant. ii. 10). Mary well understood the voice of God calling her to devote herself to His love. And thus enlightened she at once offered herself to her Lord. Behold, O Mary, I this day present myself to thee, and in union with thee I renounce all creatures and devote myself entirely to the love of my Creator.

I.

Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house (Ps. xlv. 11). The holy Virgin obeyed this divine call with promptitude and with generosity. From the first moment that the heavenly child was sanctified in her mother's womb, which was at the instant of her Immaculate Conception, she received the perfect use of reason and she began to merit. And immediately, as an Angel revealed to St. Bridget, our Queen determined to sacrifice her will to God, and to give Him all her love for the whole of her life.

Mary, hearing that her holy parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, had consecrated her by Vow to God, requested them with earnestness to take her to the Temple, and accomplish their promise. At the age of three years, as St. Epiphanius tells us -- an age at which children are the most desirous and stand in the

greatest need of their parents' care -- Mary desired to consecrate herself to God.

Behold, then, Joachim and Anne, generously sacrificing to God the most precious treasure they possessed in the world, and the treasure dearest to their hearts. They set forth from Nazareth carrying their well-beloved little daughter in turn, for she could not otherwise have undertaken so long a journey as that from Nazareth to Jerusalem, a distance of eighty miles. They were accompanied by few relatives, but choirs of Angels escorted and served the Immaculate little Virgin, who was about to consecrate herself to the Divine Majesty. *How beautiful are thy steps ... O prince's daughter.* (Cant. vii. 1). "O how beautiful," must the Angels have sung, "how acceptable to God is thy every step taken on the way to present and offer thyself to Him, O noble daughter, most beloved of our common Lord!"

O beloved Mother of God, most amiable child, Mary, who didst present thyself in the Temple, and with promptitude and without reserve didst consecrate thyself to the glory and love of God; O that I could offer thee this day the first years of my life, to devote myself without reserve to thy service, my holy and most sweet Lady! But it is now too late to do this, for I have lost many years in the service of the world. Woe to that time in which I did not love thee! But it is better to begin, now at last than not at all. O Mary, I this day present myself to thee, and in union with thee I renounce all creatures and devote myself entirely to the love of my Creator. Do thou help my weakness by thy powerful intercession.

II.

God Himself with the whole Heavenly Court made great rejoicings on the day that Mary presented herself to be His Spouse in the Temple. For He never saw a more holy creature, or one He so tenderly loved, come to offer herself to Him.

When the holy company reached the Temple the fair child turned to her parents and, on her knees, kissed their hands and asked their blessing; and then without turning back, she ascended the steps of the Temple. She bade farewell to the world, and renouncing all the pleasures it promises to its votaries, she offered and consecrated herself to her Creator.

At the time of the Deluge a raven sent out by Noe, remained to feed on the dead bodies; but the dove, without resting her foot, quickly *returned to him into the ark* (Gen. vii. 9). Many who are sent by God into this world unfortunately remain to feed on earthly goods. It was not thus our heavenly dove, Mary, acted. She knew that God should be our only Good, our only Hope, our only Love; and she knew that the world is full of dangers, and that *he who leaves it the soonest is most free from its snares*. Hence she sought to do this from her tenderest years, and as soon as possible shut herself up in the sacred retirement of the Temple, where she could the better hear God's voice, and honour and love Him more. *Rejoice with me, all ye who love God, for when I was a little one I pleased the Most High.* (Off. B.V.M.).

O happy Virgin Mary, who didst begin so soon to serve God, and who didst always serve Him so faithfully! Ah, cast a look on me who have returned to Him with such tardiness, after so many years lost in the love of creatures. Obtain for me the grace to give God at least the remainder of my life, be it long or short. Teach me, O Lady, what I should now do to belong entirely to God, and thus to repair the time I have lost. Thou hast already done so much for me, finish the work of my salvation. Do not abandon me till thou seest me safe at thy feet in Paradise. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

VI. DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED FOR ENTERING RELIGION

He who is called by God to a Religious Institute in which regular observance reigns should understand that the end of every such Institute is that its members walk in the footsteps and imitate as exactly as possible the example of the most holy life of Jesus Christ -- a life entirely detached and mortified, full of sufferings and humiliations. I have said *an Institute in which regular observance reigns*, for it would be better, perhaps, *to remain in the world* than to enter *a Religious Institute that is relaxed*.* He, then, who resolves to enter such a Religious Institute must, at the same time, resolve to enter in order to suffer and deny himself in everything, as Jesus Christ has Himself declared to those who

wish to follow Him perfectly: *If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* He must be firm in his resolution to suffer, and to suffer much, so that afterwards he may not give way to temptations, when, having entered Religion, he feels pressed down under the hardships and privations of the poor and mortified life which is led in Religion.

*"Si Institutum relaxatum est, melius erit alicui, ordinarie loquendo, quod in saeculo remaneat." (Homo Apost.: Tract. Ult. 39).

There are many who, on entering a fervent Community, do not take the proper means of finding peace therein, and of becoming Saints, because they only place before their eyes the advantages of Community life, such as the solitude, the quiet, the freedom from the troubles caused by relatives, from strife and other disagreeable matters, and from the cares consequent on being obliged to think of one's lodging, food, and clothing.

There is no doubt that a Religious is, indeed, much indebted to his Institute, which delivers him from so many troubles, and thus procures for him so great a facility to serve God perfectly in peace, continually furnishing him with so many means for the welfare of his soul, with the good example of his companions, and good advice from his Superiors, who are watchful for his benefit, and with so many exercises conducive to eternal salvation. All this is true; but in order not to be deprived of so blessed a lot, he must resolve to embrace all the sufferings he may, on the other hand, meet with in Religion; for if he does not embrace these with love, he will never obtain that full peace which God gives to those who overcome themselves: *To him that overcomes I will give the hidden manna* (Apoc. ii. 17). For the peace which God gives His faithful servants to taste is hidden; nor is it known to men of the world, who, seeing their mortified life, far from envying, pity them and call them the unhappy ones of this earth! But "they see the Cross, the unction they do not see," says St. Bernard. They see their mortification, but they do not see the contentment which God gives them to enjoy.

It is true that in the spiritual life one has to suffer, but, as St. Teresa says, when one resolves to suffer the pain ceases. Nay, the pains themselves turn into joy. "My daughter," so the Lord said

one day to St. Bridget, "the treasure-house of My graces seems to be surrounded with thorns; but for him who overcomes the first prickles, all is changed into sweetness." And then those delights which God gives to His beloved souls in their prayers, in their Communion, in their solitude; those lights, those holy ardours and that intimate union with God, that quiet of conscience, that blessed hope of eternal life -- ah, who can understand them, if he does not experience them? "One drop of the consolations of God," says St. Teresa, "is worth more than all the consolations and the delights of the world." Our most gracious God knows well how, even in this valley of tears, to give him who suffers something for His sake, a foretaste of the glory of the Blessed; for in this is truly verified that which David says: *Thou who feignest labour in commandment* (Ps. xciii. 20). In the spiritual life, God, when announcing pains, tediousness, death, seems to feign labour, but, in fact, there is no labour; for the spiritual life brings to them who entirely give themselves to God that peace which, St. Paul says, *surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7). It surpasses all the pleasures of the world and of worldlings. Hence we see a Religious more content in a poor cell than all the monarchs in their royal palaces. *O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps. xxxiii. 9). He who has not made the trial cannot understand it.

On the other hand, he who does not resolve to suffer and to overcome himself in what is distasteful, must be persuaded that he will never enjoy this true peace, though he should have already entered Religion. *To him that overcomes, I will give the hidden manna* (Apoc. ii. 17). It is then necessary that he who wishes to be admitted into an Institute of observance should enter with a mind determined to overcome himself in everything, by expelling from his heart every inclination and desire that is not *from* God, or *for* God. Hence he must detach himself from all things, and especially from the following: Comforts, Parents, Self-esteem, and Self-will.

Evening Meditation

THE GREATEST SORROW OF JESUS

I.

What profit is there in my blood, whilst I go down to corruption (Ps. xxix. 10).

Jesus Christ revealed to the Venerable Agatha of the Cross that whilst He was in His Mother's womb, that which afflicted Him more than any other sorrow was the hardness of the hearts of men, who would, after His Redemption, despise the graces which He came into the world to diffuse. And He had expressed this sentiment before, by the mouth of David, in the words just quoted, which are generally thus understood by the holy Fathers: *What profit is there in my blood, whilst I go down to corruption?* St. Isidore explains *whilst I descend into corruption* "whilst I descend to take the nature of man, so corrupted by vices and sins"; as if He had said: "O my Father, I am indeed going to clothe Myself with human flesh, in order to shed My Blood for men; but *what profit is there in my blood?* The greater part of the world will set no value on My Blood, and will go on offending Me, as if I had done nothing for the love of them."

This sorrow was the bitter chalice which Jesus begged the Eternal Father to remove from Him, saying: *Let this chalice pass from me.* (Matt. xxvi. 39). What chalice? The sight of the contempt with which His love was treated. This made Him exclaim again on the Cross: *My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?* (Matt. xxvii. 46). Our Lord revealed to St. Catherine of Sienna that this was the abandonment of which He complained -- the knowledge, namely, that His Father would have to permit that His Passion and His love should be despised by so many men for whom He died.

O my most amiable Jesus, how much have I, too, caused Thee to suffer during Thy lifetime! Thou hast shed Thy Blood for me with so much sorrow and love, and what fruit hast Thou hitherto drawn from me but contempt, offences, and insults? But, my Redeemer, I will no longer afflict Thee; I hope that in future Thy Passion will produce fruit in me by Thy grace, which I feel is already assisting me. I will love Thee above every other good; and to please Thee, I am ready to give my life a thousand times.

II.

And this same sorrow tormented the Infant Jesus in the womb of Mary, the foresight of such a prodigality of sorrows, of ignominy, of blood-shedding, and of so cruel and ignominious

a death, and all to so little purpose. The holy Child saw, even there, what the Apostle says: that many, indeed the greater number, would trample under foot His Blood and despise His grace, which this Blood would obtain for them: *Treading under foot the Son of God ... and offering an affront to the Spirit of grace* (Heb. x. 29). But if we have been of the number of those ungrateful men, let us not despair. Jesus, at His birth, came to offer peace to men of goodwill, as He made the Angels sing: *And on earth peace to men of good-will* (Luke ii. 14). Let us, then, change our will, repent of our sins, and resolve to love this good God, and we shall find peace, that is, the Divine friendship.

Eternal Father, I should not have the boldness to appear before Thee to implore either pardon or grace, but Thy Son has told me, that whatever grace I ask of Thee in His Name Thou wilt grant it to me: *If ye shall ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you* (Jo. xvi. 23). I offer Thee, therefore, the merits of Jesus Christ, and in His Name I ask of Thee first a general pardon for all my sins; I ask holy perseverance even unto death; I ask of Thee, above all, the gift of Thy holy love, that it may make me always live according to Thy divine will. As to my own will, I am resolved to choose a thousand deaths sooner than offend Thee, and to love Thee with my whole heart, and to do everything that I possibly can to please Thee. But in order to do all this, I beg of Thee, and hope to receive from Thee, grace to execute what I propose. My Mother Mary, if Thou wilt pray for me I am safe. Oh, pray for me, pray; and cease not to pray until thou seest that I am changed, and made what God wishes me to be.

Third Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE JOY OF JESUS' COMING

Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice! The Lord is nigh. (Epistle of Sunday. Philip. iv. 4, 7).

Take comfort, take comfort, O men, saith the Lord, by the mouth of Isaias: *Be comforted; be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her; for her evil is come to an end; her iniquity is forgiven* (Is. xl. 1). God hath discov-

ered a way of saving man, while at the same time His Justice and His Mercy shall both be satisfied. *Justice and Peace have kissed* (Ps. lxxxiv. 11).

I.

Speaking of the coming of the Redeemer, Isaias made this prediction: *The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the lily* (Is. xxxv. 1). The Prophet had been speaking of the pagans (among whom were our own unfortunate ancestors) who were living in heathendom, as in a desert land void of a single man that knew or worshipped the true God, but peopled only with those who were slaves of the devil -- a land *desolate and impassable*, because there was no path of salvation known to those wretched people. He foretold that the world, though so miserable then, would yet rejoice at the coming of the Messiah and would see itself filled with followers of the true God, strengthened by His grace against all the enemies of their salvation; and that the whole land would blossom as the lily by purity of morals and the sweet odour of all virtues. Wherefore Isaias proceeds to say: *Say to the faint hearted: Take courage and fear not! God himself will come and save you!* (Ibid. 4).

This very event, foretold by Isaias, has already happened. Let me, then, acclaim with gladness: Go on joyfully, O children of Adam! Go on joyfully! Be no more faint-hearted! Even though you perceive yourselves weak and unable to stand against so many enemies, *Fear not! God himself will come and save you.* God Himself has come on earth, and has redeemed us, by imparting to us strength sufficient to combat and to vanquish every enemy of our salvation.

Oh, happy me, if from this day forward I shall be able always to say with the Sacred Spouse: *My beloved to me and I to him!* (Cant. iii. 16). My God, my Beloved has given Himself all to me. It is but reasonable for me to give myself all to my God, and to say: *What have I in heaven and besides thee what do I desire on earth!* (Ps. lxxii. 25). Oh, my beloved Infant, my dear Redeemer, since Thou hast come down from Heaven to give Thyself to me what else shall I care for or seek in Heaven or on earth besides Thee, Who art my Sovereign Good, my only Treasure, the Paradise

of souls! Be Thou, then, the sole Lord of my heart and do Thou possess it wholly. May my heart obey Thee alone! May my soul love Thee alone and mayst Thou alone be its portion! Amen.

II.

You have no grounds for being sad any more, says St. Leo, on account of the sentence of death fulminated against you, now that Life itself is born for you; "nor is there any lawful room for sadness when it is the Birthday of Life." And St. Augustine exclaims: "O sweet day for penitents! Today sin is taken away and shall the sinner despair!" Speed on then with gladness, O ye souls that love God and hope in God, speed on your way with gladness! What if Adam's sin and still more our own sins, have wrought sad ruin on us? Let us understand that Jesus Christ, by the Redemption, has infinitely more than repaired our ruin. *Where sin abounded, grace did more abound* (Rom. v. 20).

The Lord said: I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly (Jo. x. 10). I am come to give life to men and a more abundant measure than that which they had lost by sin. *Not as the offence, so also the gift* (Rom. v. 15). Great has been man's sin; but greater, says the Apostle, has been the gift of Redemption. *And with him plentiful redemption* (Ps. cxxix. 7). For this reason the Church styles the fault of Adam a *happy fault*: "O happy fault which deserved to have such and so great a Redeemer!"

Oh, how much more are we bound to thank God for having brought us into life after the coming of the Messiah! How did the Prophets and the Patriarchs of the Old Testament long to see the Redeemer born! But they saw Him not! *Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just!* (Is. xlv. 8), was their incessant exclamation. *Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the Ruler of the earth!* Such were the longing exclamations of the Saints! But for all that, during the space of four thousand years they had not the happy lot to see the Messiah born. We, however, have had this happiness! But what are we doing? Do we know how to love this amiable Redeemer? Very great would be your ingratitude to your God, O Christian soul, if you were not to love Him, after He has been pleased to be bound in swaddling-clothes that you may be released from the chains of hell; after He has become poor that you may be made partaker of His riches; after He has

made Himself weak to give you strength against your enemies; after He has chosen to suffer and weep, that by His tears your sins may be washed away.

O sweet Infant, give me Thy love and then do with me what Thou wilt. I was once a slave of hell, but now that I am free from those unhappy chains, I consecrate myself entirely to Thee. I give Thee my body, my goods, my life, my soul, my will and my liberty. I desire no longer to belong to myself, but only to Thee, my only Good! Ah, bind my heart to Thy feet, that it may no more stray from Thee! O most holy Mary, obtain for me the grace of living united to thy Son by the blessed chains of love. He grants all that thou askest. Pray to Him! Pray to Him for me! This is my hope. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

"THE WAY OF THE LORD"

In his preaching St. John the Baptist exclaimed: *Make straight the way of the Lord* (Jo. i. 23). In order to be able to walk always in the way of the Lord, without turning to the right or to the left, it is necessary to adopt the proper means. There are two very important means about which we will speak to you here. 1. *To put away confidence in self*. 2. *To have confidence in God*.

I. WE MUST PUT AWAY ALL SELF-CONFIDENCE.

With fear and trembling, says the Apostle, St. Paul, *work out your salvation* (Phil. ii. 12). To secure eternal salvation we must be always penetrated with fear, we must be afraid of ourselves -- *with fear and trembling* -- and distrust altogether our own strength; for without the divine aid we can do nothing. *Without me*, says Jesus Christ, *you can do nothing* (Jo. xv. 5). We can do nothing for the salvation of our souls. St. Paul tells us that of ourselves we are not capable of even a good thought. *Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God* (2 Cor. iii. 5). Without the aid of the Holy Ghost, we cannot even pronounce the Name of Jesus so as to deserve a reward. *And no one can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost* (I Cor. xii. 3).

Miserable the man who trusts to himself in the way of God! St. Peter experienced the sad effects of self-confidence. Jesus Christ said to him: *In this night before the cock crow thou wilt deny me*

thrice (Matt. xxvi. 34). Trusting in his own strength and his goodwill, the Apostle replied: *Yea, though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee* (Ib. 35). What was the result? On the night on which Jesus Christ had been taken, Peter was reproached in the court of Caiphas with being one of the disciples of the Saviour. The reproach filled him with fear; he thrice denied his Master, and swore that he had never known Him! Humility and diffidence in ourselves are so necessary for us, that God permits us sometimes to fall into sin, that by our fall we may acquire humility and a knowledge of our own weakness. Through want of humility David also fell: hence, after his sin, he said: *Before I was humbled I offended* (Ps. cxviii. 67).

Hence the Holy Ghost pronounces the man blessed who is always in fear: *Blessed is the man who is always fearful* (Prov. xxviii. 14). He who is afraid of falling distrusts his own strength, avoids as much as possible all dangerous occasions, and recommends himself often to God, and thus preserves his soul from sin. But the man who is not fearful, but full of self-confidence, easily exposes himself to the danger of sin: he seldom recommends himself to God, and thus he falls. Let us imagine a person suspended over a great precipice by a cord held by another. Surely he would constantly cry out to the person who supports him: "Hold fast, hold fast; for God's sake, do not let go." We are all in danger of falling into the abyss of every crime, if God does not support us. Hence we should constantly beseech Him to keep His hand over us, and to succour us in all dangers.

On rising from bed, St. Philip Neri used to say every morning: "O Lord, keep Thy hand this day over Philip; if Thou do not, Philip will betray Thee." And one day, as he walked through the city reflecting on his own misery, he frequently said: "I despair, I despair." A certain Religious who heard him, believing that the Saint was really tempted to despair, corrected him, and encouraged him to hope in the divine mercy. But the Saint replied: "I despair of myself, but I trust in God." Hence, during this life, in which we are exposed to so many dangers of losing God, it is necessary for us to live always in great diffidence of ourselves, and full of confidence in God.

II. WE MUST HAVE GREAT CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

St. Francis de Sales says that mere self-diffidence on account of our own weakness would only render us pusillanimous, and expose us to great danger of abandoning ourselves to a tepid life, or even to despair. The more we distrust our own strength, the more we should confide in the divine mercy. This is a balance, says the same Saint, in which the more the scale of confidence in God is raised, the more the scale of diffidence in ourselves descends.

Listen to me, O sinners who have had the misfortune of having hitherto offended God, and of being condemned to hell: If the devil tells you that but little hope remains of your eternal salvation, answer him in the words of the Scripture: *No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded* (Ecclus. ii. 11). No sinner has ever trusted in God and been lost. Make, then, a firm purpose to sin no more; abandon yourselves into the arms of the divine goodness; and rest assured that God will have mercy on you, and save you from hell. *Cast thy care upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee* (Ps. liv. 23). The Lord one day said to St. Gertrude: "He who confides in Me does Me such violence that I cannot but hear all his petitions."

But, says the Prophet Isaias, *they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint* (Is. xl. 31). They who place their confidence in God shall renew their strength; they shall lay aside their own weakness, and shall acquire the strength of God; they shall fly like eagles in the way of the Lord, without fatigue and without ever failing. David says, that *Mercy shall encompass him that hopeth in the Lord* (Ps. xxi. 10). He who hopes in the Lord shall be encompassed by His mercy, so that he shall never be abandoned by it.

St. Cyprian says that the divine mercy is an inexhaustible fountain. They who bring vessels of the greatest confidence, draw from it the greatest graces. Hence, the Royal Prophet has said: *Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in thee* (Ps. xxxii. 22). Whenever the devil terrifies us by placing before our eyes the great difficulty of persevering in the grace of God in spite of all the dangers and sinful occasions of this life, let us, without answering him, raise our eyes to God, and hope that in

His goodness He will certainly send us help to resist every attack. *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me* (Ps. cxx. 2). And when the enemy represents to us our weakness, let us say with the Apostle: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13). Of myself I can do nothing; but I trust in God, that by His grace I shall be able to do all things.

Hence, in the midst of the greatest dangers of perdition to which we are exposed, we should continually turn to Jesus Christ and, throwing ourselves into the hands of Him Who redeemed us by His death, and say: *Into thy hands I commend my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth* (Ps. xxx. 6). This prayer should be said with great confidence of obtaining eternal life, and to it we should add: *In thee, O Lord, I have hoped; let me not be confounded forever* (Ib. 1).

Evening Meditation

THE LOVE OF JESUS FOR US IN BECOMING MAN

I.

The charity of Christ presseth us (2 Cor. v. 14). It was not enough, says St. Augustine, for the Divine Love to have made us to His own Image in creating the first man, Adam, but He must also Himself be made to our image in redeeming us. Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, beguiled by the serpent which suggested to Eve that if she ate of that fruit she should become like to God, acquiring the knowledge of good and evil; and therefore the Lord then said: *Behold, Adam is become one of us!* (Gen. iii. 2). God said this ironically, and to upbraid Adam for his vast presumption. But after the Incarnation of the Word we can truly say: "Behold, God has become one of us!"

"Look, then, O man," exclaims St. Augustine, "thy God is made thy Brother!" Thy God is made like to thee, a Son of Adam, as thou art; He has put on the self-same flesh, has made Himself passible, liable as thou art to suffer and to die. He could have assumed the nature of an Angel, but no, He would take upon Himself thy very flesh, that thus He might give satisfaction to God with the very same flesh, though sinless, of Adam the sinner. And He even gloried in this, oftentimes styling Himself the *Son of Man*. Hence we have every right to call Him our Brother.

It was an immeasurably greater humiliation for God to

become a Man than if all the princes of the earth, and all the Angels and Saints of Heaven, with the divine Mother herself, had been turned into a blade of grass, or into a handful of clay; yes, for grass, clay, princes, Angels, Saints, are all *creatures*; but between the *creature* and *God* there is an *infinite difference*. Ah, exclaims St. Bernard, the more God has humbled Himself for us in becoming Man, so much the more has He made His goodness known to us: "The *smaller* He has become by humility, the *greater* He has made Himself in bounty." But the love which Jesus Christ bears to us, exclaims the Apostle, irresistibly urges and impels us to love Him: *The charity of Christ presseth us*.

Let us say with St. Augustine: "O Fire, ever burning, inflame me." O Word Incarnate, Thou wert made Man to enkindle divine love in our hearts: and how couldst Thou have met with such a want of gratitude in the hearts of men? Thou hast spared nothing to induce them to love Thee; Thou hast even gone so far as to give Thy Blood and Thy life for them: and how, then, can men still remain so ungrateful? Do they, perchance, not know it? Yes, they know it, and they believe that for them Thou didst come down from Heaven to put on mortal flesh, and to load Thyself with our miseries; they know that for their love Thou didst lead a painful life, and embrace an ignominious death; and how, then, can they live forgetful of Thee? They love relatives, friends; they love even animals: if from them they receive any token of good-will they are anxious to repay it; and yet towards Thee alone are they so loveless and ungrateful. But, alas! in accusing them, I am my own accuser; I who have treated Thee worse than anyone else.

O God! did not Faith assure us of it, who could ever believe that a God, for love of such a worm as man is, should Himself become a worm like him? A devout author says: Suppose, by chance, that, passing on your way, you should have crushed to death a worm in your path; and then some one, observing your compassion for the poor reptile, should say to you: 'Well, now, if you would restore that dead worm to life, you must first yourself become a worm like it, and then must shed all your blood, and make a bath of it in which to wash the worm, and it shall revive' -- what would you reply? You would surely say: 'And what

matters it to me whether the worm be alive or dead, if I should have to purchase its life by my own death?' And the more would you say so if it was not a harmless worm, but an ungrateful asp, which, in return for all your benefits, had made an attempt upon your life. But even should your love for that reptile reach so far as to induce you to suffer death in order to restore it to life, what would men say then? And what would not that serpent do for you whose death had saved it, supposing it were capable of reason? But this much has Jesus Christ done for you, most vile worm; and you, with the blackest ingratitude, have tried oftentimes to take away His life; and your sins would have done so, were Jesus liable to die again. How much viler are you in the sight of God than is a worm in your own sight! What difference would it make to God had you remained dead and forever reprobate in your sins, as you well deserved? Nevertheless, this God had such a love for you that, to release you from eternal death, He first became a worm like you; and then, to save you, would lavish upon you His Heart's Blood, even to the last drop, and endure the death which you had justly deserved, Yes, all this is of Faith: *And the Word was made Flesh* (Jo. i. 14). *He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood* (Apoc. i. 5).

O my Jesus, Thy Goodness encourages me! I am well aware, my Redeemer, that my heart is no longer worthy of Thy acceptance, since it has forsaken Thee for the love of creatures; but, at the same time, I see that Thou art willing to have it, and with my entire will I dedicate it and present it to Thee. In flame it, then, wholly with Thy divine love, and grant that from this day forward it may never love any other but Thee, O infinite Goodness, worthy of an infinite love. I love Thee, my Jesus; I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! I love Thee, O only Love of my soul!

O Mary, my Mother, thou who *art the mother of fair love* (Eccclus. xxiv. 24), do thou obtain for me this grace to love my God; I hope it of thee.

Monday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. VI.
Consider the peace that God gives to good Religious.

St. Teresa used to say that one drop of heavenly consolation is worth more than all the delights of the world. Oh, what contentment does he not find, who, having left all for God, is able to say with St. Francis: "Deus meus et omnia!" -- My God and my All! -- free from the world's slavery, and enjoying the liberty of the Children of God.

I.

The promises of God cannot fail. God has said: *Every one that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting* (Matt. xix. 29). That is to say, a hundredfold on this earth, and life everlasting in Heaven.

Peace of the soul is of greater value than all the kingdoms of the world. And what avails it to have dominion over the whole world without interior peace? Better is it to be the poorest peasant in the land and content, than to be the lord of the whole world, and to live a discontented life. But who can give this peace? The world? Oh no, peace is a blessing that is obtained only from God. "O God!" the Church prays, "give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." He is called *the God of all consolation* (2 Cor. i. 3). But if God be the sole Giver of peace, to whom, think you, will He give that peace if not to those who leave all, and detach themselves from all creatures, in order to give themselves entirely to their Creator? And therefore we see good Religious shut up in their cells, mortified, despised and poor, yet living a more contented life than the great ones of the world, with all the riches, the pomps, and diversions they enjoy.

St. Scholastica said that if men knew the peace good Religious enjoy, the whole world would become a monastery; and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said that if men knew it they would scale the walls in order to get into the monasteries. The human heart having been created for an infinite Good, finite creatures cannot content it. God alone, Who is an Infinite Good can content it: *Delight in the Lord and he will give thee the request of thy heart* (Ps. xxxvi. 4). Oh no; a good Religious united with God envies none of the princes of the world who possess kingdoms, riches and honours. "Let the rich," he will say with St. Paulinus, "have their riches, the kings have their kingdoms, to me Christ is my

kingdom and my glory." He will see lovers of the world foolishly glory in pomp and vanity; but he, seeking to detach himself more from earthly things, and to unite himself more closely to God, will live contented in this life, and may well say: *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we call upon the name of the Lord, our God* (Ps. xix. 8).

O my Lord and my God, my All! I know that Thou alone canst make me contented in this life and in the next. But I will not love Thee for my own contentment; I will love Thee to content Thy divine Heart. I wish this to be my peace, my only satisfaction during my whole life, to unite my will to Thy holy will, even should I have to suffer pain in order to do this. Thou art my God, I am Thy creature.

II.

St. Teresa used to say that one drop of heavenly consolation is worth more than all the delights of the world. Father Charles of Lorraine, having become a Religious, said that God, by one moment of the happiness that He gave him to feel in Religion, superabundantly paid him for all he had left for God. Hence his jubilation was sometimes so great that, when alone in his cell, he could not help dancing for very joy. The Blessed Seraphino of Ascoli, a Capuchin Lay-brother, said that he would not exchange a foot length of his cord for all the kingdoms of the world.

Oh, what contentment does he not find, who, having left all for God is able to say with St. Francis: "My God and my All!" and to see himself thus freed from the servitude of the world, from the thralldom of worldly fashion, and from all purely earthly affections. This is the liberty enjoyed by the children of God, and such good Religious are. It is true that in the beginning, the deprivation of the reunions and pastimes of the world, the observances in Community and of the Rules, seem to be thorns; but these thorns, as Our Lord said to St. Bridget, will all become flowers and delights of Paradise to him who courageously bears their first prickles, and then he will taste on earth that peace which, St. Paul says, surpasseth all the gratification of the senses, the enjoyments of feasts, of banquets, and other pleasures of the world: *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7). And what greater peace can there be than to know that one

pleases God?

And what greater good can I hope for than to please Thee, my Lord and my God, Who hast been so partial in Thy love towards me. Thou, O my Jesus, hast left Heaven to live for love of me a poor and mortified life. I leave all to live only for Thee, my most Blessed Redeemer. I love Thee with my whole heart. If only Thou wilt give me the grace to love Thee, treat me as Thou pleasest.

O Mary, Mother of God, protect me and render me like to thee, not in thy glory which I do not deserve, but in pleasing God, and obeying His Holy Will, as thou didst. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

VII. DETACHMENT

I. From Comforts

In Religion, after the year's Novitiate, besides the Vows of Chastity and Obedience, a Vow of Poverty is made, in consequence of which, if solemn, one can never possess anything as one's own, not even a pin, or income, or money, or any other things. The Community will provide him with all that he needs. But the Vow of Poverty alone will not make one a true follower of Jesus Christ if he does not embrace with joy of spirit all the inconveniences of Poverty. "Not *poverty* but the *love of poverty*, is a virtue," says St. Bernard, and he means to say that to become holy it is not enough to be simply poor -- one must also love the inconveniences of poverty. "Oh, how many wish to be poor and like to Jesus Christ," says Thomas a Kempis, "*but without wanting for anything!*" They would have, in a word, the *honour and reward* of Poverty, but not the *inconveniences* of Poverty. It is easy to understand that in Religion no one will seek for things that are superfluous -- garments of silk, choice dishes, valuable furniture, and the like; but he will desire to have all things that are necessary, and these he may be unable to get. It is then he gives proof that he truly loves Poverty, when things that are necessary -- such as the usual clothing, bed-covering or food -- happen to be wanting, if he remains content and is not troubled. And what kind of Poverty would that be never to suffer the want of anything necessary? Father Balthasar Alvarez says that in order truly

to love Poverty, we must also love the effects of poverty; that is, as he specifies them: *cold, hunger, thirst and contempt.*

A Religious must not only be content with that which is given to him, without ever asking for anything which the officials of the Community may have forgotten to furnish him with -- which would be a great defect -- but he must be prepared to suffer, now and then, the want even of those simple things that the Rule allows. For it may happen that sometimes he is in want of clothing, bed-covering, linen, food, and such-like things, and then he has to be satisfied with that little which can be given him, without complaining or being disquieted at seeing himself in want even of what is necessary. He who has not this spirit, ought not to think of entering Religion, because it is a sign that he is not called thereto, or that he has not the will to embrace the spirit of a Religious Institute. "He who goes to serve God in His House," says St. Teresa, "ought to consider that he is going, not to be well treated for God, but to suffer for God."

II. From Relations

He who would enter Religion should be detached from and forget his relations, for, in Religious houses of exact observance, detachment from relations is enforced in the highest degree, in order to follow perfectly the teaching of Jesus Christ Who said: *I came not to send peace but the sword: I came to set a man at variance with his father* (Matt. x. 34, 35); and He added the reason: *A man's enemies shall be they of his own household* (Ib. 36). And this is especially the case, as has been remarked already, where there is a question of a Religious Vocation. When a person called by God wishes to leave the world, there are no worse enemies than parents, who, either through interest or passion, prefer to become enemies of God, by turning their children away from their Vocation, rather than give their consent. Oh! how many parents shall we see in the Valley of Josaphat damned for having made their children lose their Religious Vocation! and how many youths shall we see lost who, in order to please their parents, and by not detaching themselves from them, have lost their Vocation and afterwards their souls! Hence, Jesus declares to us: *If any man hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple* (Luke xiv.

26). Let him, then, who wishes to enter a Religious Institute of perfect observance, and to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, resolve to detach himself from his parents.

And should he have already entered Religion, let him remember that he must practise this same detachment. Let him know that he cannot go to visit his parents in their own house, except in the case of some dangerous illness of his father or mother, or of some urgent necessity, and always with the permission of the Superior. To go to the house of one's parents without this permission would be considered in Religion a most notable and scandalous fault. In Religion it is considered a defect even to ask permission or to show a desire of seeing parents or of speaking with them.

St. Charles Borromeo said that when he visited his family he always, on his return, found himself less fervent in spirit. And let him who goes to his relations by his own will and not through a positive obedience to his Superiors, be persuaded that he will return either tempted or lukewarm.

St. Vincent de Paul could only be induced once to visit his country and his parents, and this out of pure necessity. He said that the love of home and country was a great impediment to his spiritual progress. He narrated how many, on account of having visited their home, had become so tender towards their relatives that they were like flies, which being once entangled in a cobweb, cannot extricate themselves from it. He added: "For that one visit of mine, though it was for a short time only, and though I took care to remove from my relatives every hope of help from me, I, nevertheless, felt at leaving them such pain that I ceased not to weep all along the road, and was for three months harassed by the thought of succouring them. Finally, God in His mercy, took the temptation from me."

Let him know, moreover, that no one can write letters without permission, and without showing them to the Superior. He who would act otherwise would be guilty of a fault that is not to be tolerated in Religion, and he should be punished with severity; for from this might come a thousand disorders tending to destroy the religious spirit. But they especially who have just entered should know that this rule is enforced with the greatest

rigour; for novices, during their year of Novitiate, do not easily obtain permission to talk to their parents, or to write to them.

Finally, let it be remembered that should a subject fall ill, it would be a notable defect in him to ask or to show an inclination to go to his own home for his restoration to health, under the plea of better attendance, or of enjoying the benefit of his native air. The air of his own country is almost always, if not indeed always, hurtful and pestilential to the spirit of the subject. And if he should say that he wishes to be cured at home in order to save the Institute expense for remedies, this is no excuse, for he should know that the sick are treated with all care and charity in Religion. As for change of air, the Superiors will think of that; and if the air of one house is not beneficial to him, they will send him to another. And as for remedies, they will even sell their books, if need be, to provide for the sick. And thus he need not fear that Divine Providence will fail him. And if the Lord does not wish his recovery, he ought to conform to the will of God, without even mentioning the word "home." The greatest grace that he who enters Religion can desire is to die, when God wills it, in the House of God, assisted by his brethren in Religion, and not in his home in the world in the midst of his relatives.

Evening Meditation

JESUS IS THE FOUNTAIN OF GRACE.

I.

Ye shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains (Is. xii. 3).

Consider the four Fountains of grace that we have in Jesus Christ, as contemplated by St. Bernard.

The first is that of Mercy, in which we can wash ourselves from all the filthiness of our sins. This fountain was provided for us by our Redeemer with His tears and His Blood: *He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood* (Apoc. i. 5).

The second Fountain is that of Peace and Consolation in our tribulations: *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will console thee* (Ps. xlix. 15). *He that thirsteth, let him come to me, says Jesus* (Jo. vii. 37). He that thirsteth for true consolations even in this world, let him come to me, for I will satisfy him. He that once tastes the sweetness of My love will forever disdain all the delights of

the world: *But he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever* (Jo. iv. 13). And thoroughly contented will he be when he shall enter into the kingdom of the blessed, for the water of My grace shall raise him from earth to Heaven. It will *become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting* (Ibid. 14). The peace which God gives to souls that love Him is not the peace that the world promises from sensual pleasures, which leave behind more bitterness than peace: the peace which God bestows exceeds all the delights of the senses: Peace which surpasseth all understanding. Blessed are those who long for this divine fountain. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice* (Matt. v. 6).

O my sweet and dearest Saviour, how much do I not owe Thee? How much hast Thou not obliged me to love Thee, since Thou hast done for me what no servant would have done for his master, no son for his father. If Thou, therefore, hast loved me more than any other, it is just that I should love Thee above all others. I could wish to die of sorrow at the thought that Thou hast suffered so much for me, and that Thou even didst accept for my sake the most painful and ignominious death that a man could endure, and yet I have so often despised Thy friendship. But Thy merits are my hope.

The third Fountain is that of Devotion. Oh, how devoted and ready to follow the divine inspiration and increase always in virtue does not he become who often meditates on all that Jesus Christ has done for our sake! He will be like the tree planted by a stream of water. *He shall be like a tree that is planted near the running waters* (Ps. i. 3).

The fourth Fountain is that of Charity. *In my meditation a fire shall flame out* (Ps. xxxviii. 4). It is impossible to meditate on the sufferings and ignominy borne by Jesus Christ for the love of us and not to feel inflamed by that blessed fire which He came upon earth to kindle. How true it is then, that he who betakes himself to these blessed Fountains of Jesus Christ will always draw from them waters of joy and salvation! *You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's Fountains.*

Ah, my dear Jesus, I too desire to be reckoned amongst the number of Thy lovers. I now esteem Thy grace above all the

kingdoms of the earth. I love Thee, and for Thy love I accept every suffering, even death itself. And if I am not worthy to die for Thy glory by the hand of executioners, I accept willingly, at least, that death which Thou hast determined for me; I accept it in the manner and at the time that Thou shalt choose. My Mother Mary, do thou obtain for me the grace always to live and die, loving Jesus.

Tuesday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. VII.

Consider the harm done to Religious by tepidity.

Negligent souls are commonly abandoned by God. St. Teresa saw the place prepared for her in hell had she not detached herself from a certain worldly affection which, however, was but slightly culpable. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little* (Ecclus. xix. 1).

I.

Consider the misery of the Religious who, after having left his home, his parents, and the world with all its pleasures, and after having given himself to Jesus Christ, consecrating to Him his will and his liberty, exposes himself to the danger of being damned by leading a lukewarm and negligent life. Alas! such a Religious is not far from perdition, who, called into the House of God to become a Saint, leads a lukewarm life. God threatens to reject and abandon such Religious if they do not amend: *But because thou art lukewarm I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth* (Apoc. iii. 16).

St. Ignatius of Loyola, seeing that a Lay-brother of the Society had become lukewarm in the service of God, called him one day and said to him: "Tell me, my brother, why did you come into Religion?" He answered "To serve God." "O my brother!" replied the Saint, "what have you said? If you had answered that you had come to serve a Cardinal, or a prince of this earth, you would be more excusable; but you say that you came to serve God, and is it thus you serve Him?" Father Nieremberg says that some are called by God to be saved as Saints, and that if they do not take care to live as Saints, but thinking to be saved

as imperfect Christians, they will not be saved at all. And St. Augustine says that such are, in most cases, abandoned by God: "God is accustomed to abandon negligent souls." And how does He abandon them? By permitting them from lighter faults, which they see and do not amend, to fall into grievous ones, lose divine grace and their Vocation. St. Teresa of Jesus saw the place prepared for her in hell, had she not detached herself from an earthly, though not a grievously sinful affection. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.*

Many wish to follow Jesus Christ as St. Peter did, who, when his Master was arrested in the garden, says St. Matthew, *followed him afar off* (Matt. xxvi. 58). But by doing so that will easily happen to them which happened to St. Peter, namely, when the occasion came, he denied Jesus Christ. A lukewarm Religious will be contented with the little he does for God; but God, Who called him to a perfect life, will not be contented, and, in punishment for his ingratitude, will not only deprive him of special favours, but will sometimes permit his fall. "When you say: 'It is enough,' you are lost," says Augustine. The fig-tree of the Gospel was cast into the fire, only because it brought forth no fruit.

O my God! reject me not, as I deserve, for I will amend my life. I know full well that a life negligent as mine cannot satisfy Thee. I know that I have, by my lukewarmness, shut the door of my heart against the graces which Thou didst desire to bestow upon me. O Lord! do not abandon me yet awhile; I will rise from my miserable state. I will for the future be more careful to overcome my passions, to follow Thy inspirations, and I will never through slothfulness omit my duties; I will perform them with greater diligence. In short, I will, from this time forward, do all I can to please Thee, and I will neglect nothing which I know to be pleasing to Thee.

II.

Father Louis de Ponte said: "I have committed many faults, but I have never made peace with them." Miserable is the Religious who, being called to perfection, makes peace with his defects. As long as we detest our imperfections, there is hope that we may become Saints; but when we commit faults and make little of them, then, says St. Bernard, the hope of becoming Saints

is lost. *He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly* (2 Cor. ix. 6). Ordinary graces do not suffice to make one a Saint; extraordinary ones are necessary. But how shall God be liberal with His favours to one who acts sparingly and with reserve in his Love for Him?

Moreover, to become a Saint, one must have courage and strength to overcome all repugnances; and let no one ever believe, says St. Bernard, that he will be able to attain to perfection unless he distinguishes himself in the practice of virtue: "*What is perfect, cannot but be singular.*" Reflect, my brother, for what have you left the world and all it can give? It was to become a Saint. But that lukewarm and imperfect life which you lead, is that the way of becoming a Saint? St. Teresa animated her daughters by saying to them: "My sisters, you have done the principal thing necessary to become Saints; the lesser remains yet to be done." The same I say to you; you have, perhaps, done the chief part already; you have left your country, your parents, and home, your property and your amusements, the lesser part now remains to be done to become a Saint. Do it.

Since Thou, O my Jesus! hast been so liberal with Thy graces towards me, and hast deigned to give Thy Blood and Thy life for me, why should I act with such reserve towards Thee? Thou art worthy of all honour and love, and to please Thee one ought gladly to undergo every labour, and suffer every pain. But, O my Redeemer, Thou knowest my weakness, help me by Thy powerful grace; in Thee I confide. O immaculate Virgin Mary, thou who hast helped me to leave the world, help me to overcome myself and to become a Saint.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

VIII. DETACHMENT (*continued*)

III. From Self-Esteem

He who enters Religion *must be entirely detached from all self-esteem*. There are many who leave their home, their comforts, their relations, but arrive bringing with them a certain esteem for themselves: such attachment would be the worst of all. Here is the greatest sacrifice we have to offer to God, namely the giving up, not only of our goods, our pleasures, our home, but of our

own selves to Him. This is that denial of self which Jesus recommended more than anything else to His followers. And in order to deny himself, a man must tread under foot all self-esteem, by desiring and embracing every imaginable contempt that he may meet with in Religion; as, for instance, seeing others, whom perhaps he thinks less deserving, preferred to himself, or himself considered unfit to be employed, or only employed in lower or more laborious occupations. It must be understood that in the House of God those charges are the highest and the most honourable that are imposed by obedience. God forbid that any one should seek for or aspire to any office or charge of pre-eminence. This would be a strange thing in Religion, and would mark a Religious as proud and ambitious, and as such he should receive a penance, and be mortified especially on this very point. Better would it be, perhaps, that a Religious Order were destroyed than there should enter in that accursed pest of ambition which, when it enters, disfigures the most perfect Communities, and the most beautiful works of God.

On the contrary, he ought to feel interiorly consoled who sees himself made fun of and despised by his companions. I say interiorly consoled, for as to *nature*, this is not possible, nor need the Religious be uneasy at the resentment of his feelings, for it is enough that the spirit embraces such things, and that he rejoices in the superior part of the soul. Thus also when he sees himself continually reprimanded and mortified, not only by Superiors, but also by equals and inferiors, he ought heartily, and with a tranquil mind, to thank those who thus reprimand him, and have the charity to admonish him, answering that he will be more careful not to fall into that fault again.

One of the most ardent desires of the Saints in this world was to be despised for the love of Jesus Christ. It was this St. John of the Cross asked for, when Jesus Christ appeared to him with a Cross on His shoulder, and said: "John, ask from Me what thou wishest," and St. John answered: "O Lord, to suffer and to be despised for Thee." The Doctors of the Church teach, with St. Francis de Sales, that the highest degree of humility is to be pleased with objections and humiliations. And in this consists also our greatest merit before God. Some insult suffered in peace

for the love of God is of greater value in His sight than a thousand disciplines and a thousand fasts.

We must know that occasions to suffer some slight, either from Superiors or from companions, are to be found even in the most holy Communities. Read the Lives of the Saints, and you will see how many mortifications fell to the lot of a St. Francis Regis, St. Francis of Jerome, Father Torres, and others. The Lord sometimes permits that even among Saints there should exist, without any fault of theirs, certain natural antipathies, or at least, a certain diversity of character among subjects of the greatest piety, which will cause them to suffer many contradictions. At other times things will be believed that are not true. God Himself will permit this in order that the subjects may have occasion to exercise themselves in patience and humility.

In short, he will gain little in Religion and lose much who cannot quietly put up with contempt and contradictions; and, therefore, he who enters Religion to give himself entirely to God should feel ashamed not to know how to bear contempt when he appears before Jesus Christ, Who *was filled with opprobrium* for love of us. Let each one be attentive to this, and resolve to take pleasure in abjections, and to prepare himself to suffer many in Religion, for without the least doubt he will have many to bear. Otherwise, the disquiet caused by contradictions and contempt badly endured would trouble him to such a degree as to bring him to lose his Vocation, and make him abandon the Religious life. Oh, how many have lost their Vocation on account of impatience in humiliations! But of what service to an Institute, or to God, can be he who does not know how to bear contempt for God's love? And how can one ever be said to be dead to himself, according to that promise which he made to Jesus Christ on entering Religion, if he remains still alive to resentment and disquiet, when he sees himself humbled? Away then with such subjects so full of self-esteem! Yes, far away! It is well that they go as soon as possible, lest they infect the rest with their pride. In Religion each one ought to be, as it were, dead, and especially to self-esteem, otherwise it were better for him not to enter, or to depart if he has already entered.

Evening Meditation

JESUS THE CHARITABLE PHYSICIAN OF OUR SOULS

I.

But unto you the sun of justice shall rise, and health in his wings
(Mal. iv. 2).

Your Physician shall come, says the Prophet, to cure the infirm; and He will come swiftly like the bird that flies, and like the sun, which, on rising above the horizon, instantly sends its light to the other pole. But behold Him, He is already come. Let us console ourselves, and return thanks to Him.

St. Augustine says: "He descends even to the bed of the sick"; that is to say, even to taking our flesh, for our bodies are the beds of our infirm souls.

Physicians, if they love their patients, do indeed make every possible effort to cure them; but what physician, in order to cure the sick man, ever took upon himself his disease? Jesus Christ is truly that Physician, Who took on Himself our infirmities in order to cure them. Neither would He content Himself with sending another in His place, but He chose to come Himself to fulfil this charitable office in order to gain to Himself all our love.

Praised and blessed for ever be Thy Charity, O my Redeemer! And what would become of my soul, so infirm and afflicted with the many wounds of my sins, if I had not Thee, my Jesus, Who art both able and willing to heal me? O Blood of my Saviour, I trust in Thee! Wash me and heal me.

II.

He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows (Is. liii. 4). He was pleased to heal our wounds with His own Blood, and by His death deliver us from eternal death which we had deserved. In short, He chose to take the bitter medicine of a life of continual sufferings and a painful death to obtain life for us, and to deliver us from our many ills.

The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (Jo. xviii. 11), He said to Peter. It was necessary then that Jesus Christ should embrace so many ignominies to heal our pride; that He should embrace such a life of poverty to cure our covetousness; that He should suffer a sea of torments, so as to die of pure agony to cure our eagerness for sensual pleasures.

O my Love, I repent of having offended Thee. Thou hast

led a life of such tribulations and hast died such a bitter death to prove to me the love which Thou bearest me! I would fain show Thee also how much I love Thee, but what can I do -- I am so infirm, so miserable and so weak? O God of my soul Thou art Omnipotent; Thou canst cure me and make me holy. Oh, kindle in me a great desire of pleasing Thee. I renounce all my satisfactions to please Thee my Redeemer, Who dost deserve to be pleased at all cost. O Sovereign Good, I esteem Thee and love Thee above every good; make me love Thee with all my heart, and always implore Thy love. Hitherto I have offended Thee, and have not loved Thee, because I have not sought Thy love. I now beg this love of Thee, and the grace always to ask it of Thee. Hear me, by the merits of Thy Passion.

O Mary, my Mother, thou art always prepared to listen to him that prays to thee. Thou lovest him that loves thee. I love thee, my Queen. Obtain for me the grace to love God, and I ask for nothing more. Amen.

Wednesday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. VIII.

Consider how dear to God is a soul that gives itself entirely to Him.

The Son of God has already given Himself entirely to us. *A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us.* He has given Himself to us through the love He bears us. When St. Teresa gave herself to Jesus the Lord said to her: "Now because thou art all Mine, I am all thine."

I.

One is my dove, my perfect one (Cant. vi. 8). God loves all who love Him. *I love them that love me* (Prov. viii. 17). Many indeed give themselves to God, but still keep in their hearts some attachment to creatures which prevents them from belonging entirely to Him. How then will God give Himself to a soul that divides its love between Him and creatures? It is just He should act with reserve towards those who act with reserve towards Him. On the other hand, He gives Himself entirely to those souls who drive from their hearts everything that is not for God, and who can truly say: My God and my All!

St. Teresa, as long as she entertained an inordinate affection, though not an impure one, towards a certain person, could not hear from Jesus Christ what she afterwards heard, when, freeing herself from every attachment, she gave herself entirely to Divine Love, and God said to her: "Since now thou art all Mine, I am all thine!"

My beloved to me and I to him! (Cant. ii. 16). Since then, O my God, Thou has given Thyself entirely to me, I should be ungrateful, indeed, were I not to give myself entirely to Thee; since Thou wouldst have me belong wholly to Thee, behold, O my Lord, I give myself entirely to Thee. Accept me through Thy mercy and disdain me not. Grant, O Lord, that my heart, which once loved creatures, may turn now wholly to Thy infinite goodness. "Let me at last die," said St. Teresa, "and let another live in me. Let God live in me and give me life. Let Him reign, and let me be His slave, for my soul wishes no other liberty." My heart is too small, O God most worthy of love, and it is too little able to love Thee, Who art deserving of an infinite love. I should then be guilty of too great an injustice were I to divide it by loving anything besides Thee. I love Thee, my God, above everything. I love only Thee; I renounce all creatures, and give myself entirely to Thee, my Jesus, my Saviour, my Love, my All.

II.

Consider that the Son of God has not hesitated to give Himself all to us. *A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us* (Is. ix. 6). He has given Himself to us through the love He bears us. *He hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). It is, then, just, says St. Chrysostom, that as God has given Himself to you without reserve -- "He has given thee all, nothing has He left for Himself" -- you should give yourself to God without reserve, and burning with divine love should henceforth sing to Him:

Thine wholly will I always be; Thou has bestowed Thyself on me; Myself I wholly give to Thee.

St. Teresa, appearing after her death, revealed to one of her nuns that God loves a soul that, as a spouse, gives herself entirely to Him, more than a thousand who are tepid and imperfect. The choir of Seraphim is completed from these generous souls belonging entirely to God. The Lord Himself says that He loves

a soul that tends to perfection so much that He seems not to love any other: *One is my dove, my perfect one is but one* (Cant. vi. 8). Hence Blessed Giles exhorts us: "One for one -- una uni," by which he wishes to say that this one soul of ours we ought to give wholly, undivided, to that One Who alone deserves all love, on Whom depends all our good, and Who loves us more than all others love us. "Leave all and you shall find all," says Thomas a Kempis. Leave all for God and in God you will find all. "O soul!" concludes St. Bernard, "be alone, that you may keep yourself for Him alone." Keep yourself alone, give no part of your affections to creatures, that you may belong alone to Him Who alone deserves an infinite love, and Whom alone you ought to love.

What have I in heaven, and besides Thee, what do I desire on earth?... Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever (Ps. lxxii. 25). I desire nothing, either in this life or in the next, but to possess the treasure of Thy love. I am unwilling that creatures should any longer have a place in my heart; Thou alone must be its Master. To Thee alone shall it belong for the future. Thou only shalt be my God, my repose, my desire, all my love. "Give me only Thy love and Thy grace, and I am rich enough." O most holy Virgin Mary obtain for me that I may be faithful to God, and never recall the gift which I have made of myself to Him. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

IX. DETACHMENT (*continued*).

IV. From Self-Will.

He who enters Religion must absolutely give up his own will, and consecrate it without reserve to holy obedience. This condition is the most necessary of all. Of what use is it to leave comforts and relations and honours, and then bring into Religion one's own will? Renouncement of self consists especially in this: in dying spiritually and in giving one's self entirely to Jesus Christ.

The gift of the heart -- that is, of the will -- is what pleases Him most, and what He seeks from His sons and daughters in Religion. All our mortifications, all our meditations and prayers, and all other sacrifices, will be of little avail if there be not an entire detachment from and renouncement of self-will.

It is, then, evident that in this is the greatest merit before God. It is the only sure way of pleasing God in all things, because then each one can say what Jesus our Saviour said: *I do always the things that please Him* (Jo. viii. 29). He who in Religion lives without any will of his own may say and hope that in all he does, he pleases God; whether he studies or prays, or hears confessions; whether he goes to the refectory or to recreation, or to rest; for in Religion there is scarcely a step made, or a breath drawn, but in obedience to the Rule, or to Superiors.

The world does not understand, and even certain pious persons have little idea of, the great value of Community life under obedience. It is true that outside of Religious Communities there are found many persons who do much, and, may be, more than those who live under obedience -- they preach, do penance, pray and fast, but in all this they follow more or less their own will. God grant that at the Day of Judgment they may not have to lament as those mentioned in Scripture: *Why have we fasted and Thou hast not regarded, have we humbled our souls and Thou hast not taken notice? Behold, in the day of your fast, your own will is found* (Is. lviii. 3). On which passage St. Bernard remarks: "Self-will is a great evil, for through it that which is good in itself may be for you no good at all." This is to be understood when in all our exercises we seek not God, but ourselves. On the contrary, he who acts by obedience is sure that in all he does he pleases God. The Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus said that she valued exceedingly her Religious Vocation, principally for two reasons: the first was that in the monastery she enjoyed always the presence and company of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the other, that there she belonged entirely to God, sacrificing her own will to Him by obedience.

It is related by Father Rodriguez that after the death of Dositheus, the disciple of St. Dorotheus, the Lord revealed that during the five years he had lived under obedience, though by reason of his infirmities he could not practise the austerities of the other monks, yet he had merited by virtue of obedience the reward of St. Paul the Hermit and of St. Anthony the Abbot.

He, then, who wishes to enter Religion, must resolve to renounce altogether his own will, and to will only what holy

obedience wills. God preserve a Religious from ever letting escape from his lips the words "I will" or "I will not." But in all things, even when asked by Superiors what he desires, he should only answer: "I will that which holy obedience wills of me." And, provided there is no evident sin, he ought in every command imposed on him to obey blindly and without examination, because the duty of examining and deciding belongs not to him, but to his Superiors. Otherwise, even if in obeying, he does not submit his own judgment to that of the Superior, his obedience will be imperfect. St. Ignatius Loyola used to say that in matters of obedience prudence is not required in subjects, but in Superiors; and if prudence enters at all into obedience it is to obey without prudence. St. Bernard says: "Perfect obedience is indiscreet." And in another place: "For a prudent novice to remain in a Congregation is an impossible thing"; and he gives the reason, saying: "To judge belongs to the Superior, and to obey to the subject."

But to make progress in this virtue of obedience, on which all depends, he must always be ready to do all that for which he feels the greatest repugnance, and to be prepared to bear it peacefully when he sees that all he seeks or desires is refused him. It will happen that when he wishes for solitude, to apply himself to prayer or study, he will be the most employed in external labours. For though it is true that in Religion one leads as much as possible a solitary life when at home, and that for this end there are many hours of silence -- the Retreat each year of ten days, in perfect silence, and of one day each month, besides the fifteen days before the receiving of the habit, and one of fifteen before the Profession, when the Vows are made -- nevertheless, if it be an Institute of priests called to work and to be employed for the salvation of souls, the subject, if he is continually employed in this by obedience, ought to be content with the prayers and exercises of the community; he must be prepared sometimes to go even without these when obedience will have it so, without either excusing himself or being disquieted, being well persuaded of that of which St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was so confident when she said that "all the things which are done through obedience are so many prayers."

Evening Meditation

GOD HAS GIVEN HIS ONLY SON TO SAVE US.

I.

I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth (Is. xlix. 6).

Consider how the Eternal Father addressed these words to the Infant Jesus at the instant of His Conception: *I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation.* My Son, I have given Thee to the world for the Light and Life of all people, in order that Thou mayest procure for them their salvation, which I have as much at heart as if it were My own. Thou must, therefore, employ Thyself entirely for the well-being of men. "Wholly given to man Thou must be wholly spent in his service." (St. Bernard). Thou must therefore, at Thy birth, suffer extreme poverty in order that men may become rich: "that Thou mayest enrich them by Thy poverty." Thou must be sold as a slave to acquire liberty for man; and Thou must be scourged and crucified as a slave to satisfy My justice for the punishment due to man. Thou must give Thy Blood and Thy Life to deliver man from eternal death. In a word, Thou art no longer Thine own, but Thou belongest to man: *A child is born to us, a son is given to us* (Is. ix. 6). Thus, My beloved Son, man will be constrained to love Me, and to be Mine, when he sees that I give Thee, My only-begotten One, entirely to him, and that there is nothing left for Me to give him.

My dearest Jesus, if it is true (as the Law says) that dominion is acquired by gift, since Thy Father hath given Thee to me, Thou art mine; for me Thou wert born, to me Thou hast been given: *A child is born to us, a Son is given to us.* Therefore I may well say: "My Jesus and my all." Since Thou art mine, everything that belongs to Thee is also mine. Of this I am assured by Thy Apostle: *How hath he not also with him given us all things* (Rom. viii. 32). Thy Blood is mine, Thy merits are mine, Thy grace is mine, Thy Paradise is mine; and if Thou art mine who shall be able to take Thee from me? "No man can take God away from me," joyfully exclaimed the Abbot St. Anthony, and so, too, from this day forth, will I also continually say. It is only through my own fault that I can lose Thee and separate myself from Thee; but if

in past times I have abandoned Thee and lost Thee, O my Jesus, I now repent of it with all my soul, and I am resolved to lose my life and everything sooner than lose Thee, O infinite Good, and only Love of my soul!

II.

God so loved the world! O infinite love, only worthy of an Infinite God! *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten son!* (Jo. iii. 16). The Infant Jesus, far from being sorrowful at this proposal, is pleased at it, accepts it with love, and exults in it: *He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way* (Ps. lviii. 6), and from the first moment of His Incarnation He gives Himself entirely to man, and embraces with pleasure all the sorrows and ignominy that He must suffer on earth for the love of man. These were, says St. Bernard, the mountains and hills that Jesus Christ had to pass with so many labours in order to save man: *Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills* (Cant.ii. 8).

Here consider that the Divine Father, in sending His Son to be our Redeemer and Mediator between Himself and man, has in a certain sense bound Himself to forgive us and love us, on account of the Covenant He made to receive us into His favour, provided His Son satisfied His Divine justice for us. On the other hand, the Divine Word, having accepted the decree of His Father, Who, by sending Him to redeem us, has given Him to us, has also bound Himself to love us; not, indeed, for our own merits, but in order to fulfil the merciful will of His Father.

I thank Thee, Eternal Father, for having given me Thy Son; and since Thou hast given Him entirely to me, I, a miserable sinner, give myself entirely to Thee. For the sake of this same Son, accept me, and bind me with the chains of love to my dear Redeemer; but bind me so strongly that I also may be able to say: *Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?* (Rom. viii. 35). What good shall there ever be in the world that shall separate me from my Jesus? And Thou, my Saviour, if Thou art all mine, know that I am all Thine. Dispose of me, and of all that belongs to me, as shall best please Thee. And how can I refuse anything to a God Who has not refused me His Blood and His life? Mary, my Mother, do thou guard me with thy protection. I will no longer be my own. I will be all my Saviour's. Do thou help me to

be faithful; I trust in thee.

Thursday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. IX.

Consider that in order to become a Saint it is necessary to have a great desire of holiness.

No Saint has ever become a Saint without having a great desire for sanctity. As wings are necessary to fly so holy desires are necessary to the soul in order to advance in the way of perfection. *My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready!* Tell me what Thou desirest of me. I will obey Thee in all things.

I.

Holy desires are necessary to the soul in order to advance in the way of perfection. To become a Saint we must detach ourselves from creatures, conquer our passions, overcome ourselves, and love crosses. But to do all this much strength is required and we must suffer much.

But what is the effect of this holy desire? St. Laurence Justinian answers: "It supplies strength, and makes the pain easier to be borne." Hence the same Saint adds that he has already vanquished who has a great desire to vanquish. "A great part of the victory is the desire of vanquishing." He who wishes to reach the top of a high mountain will never reach it if he has not a desire to do so. This will give him courage and strength to undergo the fatigue of ascending; otherwise he will halt at the foot, wearied and discouraged.

St. Bernard asserts that we acquire perfection in proportion to the desire for it which we preserve in our hearts. St. Teresa said that God loves generous souls that have great desires; for which reason the Saint exhorted all, saying: "Let our thoughts be high, for thence will come our good. We must not have weak desires, but have confidence in God by which we shall, little by little, attain that perfection to which, by God's grace, the Saints attained." It was thus the Saints gained, in a short time, a great degree of perfection, and were able to do great things for God: *Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time* (Wis. iv. 13). St. Aloysius Gonzaga attained in a few years (he was only

twenty-three when he died) such a degree of sanctity that St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, beholding him in spirit in Heaven, said it seemed to her, in a certain way, that there was no Saint in Heaven who enjoyed greater glory than Aloysius. She understood at the same time that he had arrived at so high a degree by the great desire he had to love God as much as He deserved, and that, seeing this beyond his power, the holy youth had suffered on earth a martyrdom of love.

Behold, O my God! here I am. *My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready* (Ps. lvi. 8). See, I am prepared to do all that Thou shalt require of me. *O Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* (Acts ix. 6). Tell me what Thou desirest of me. I will obey Thee in all things. I am sorry for having lost so much time in which I might have pleased Thee, and have not done so. I thank Thee that still Thou givest me time to do it. Oh, no, I will not lose any more time. I will and I desire to become a Saint, not to obtain from Thee greater glory and more delights. I desire it that I may love Thee more, and that I may please Thee in this life and in the next.

II.

St. Bernard, when a Religious, was accustomed to say to himself in order to excite his fervour: *Bernarde, ad quid venisti?* -- "Bernard, for what hast thou come hither?" I say the same to you: What have you come to the House of God to do? Why have you left the world? To become a Saint? And what are you doing? Why do you lose time? Tell me -- do you *desire* to become a Saint? If you do not *desire* it, then, certainly, you will never become a Saint. If you have not this desire, ask Jesus Christ for it: ask Mary for it. And if you have it, take courage, says St. Bernard, for many there are who do not become Saints just because they are not courageous. And so, I repeat, let us take courage and great courage. Why should we fear? Why be cast down? Our Blessed Lord Who gave us strength to leave the world, will give us also the grace to embrace the life of a Saint. Everything comes to an end. Our life, be it a contented or a discontented one, will also come to an end, but eternity will never end. That little which we have done for God will alone console us at death and throughout eternity. The labour will be short, the crown,

which is already in sight, will be immortal. How well pleased the Saints are now with all they have suffered for God! If sorrow could enter Paradise, the blessed would be sorry only that they neglected to do more for God than they had done, and now they are unable to do it. Courage, then, make haste, for there is no time to lose; what can be done today we may not be able to do tomorrow. St. Bernardine of Sienna used to say that one moment of time is of as great value as God Himself, for at each moment we may gain God, His divine grace, and higher degrees of merit.

Make me, O Lord, to love and please Thee as much as Thou desirest. Behold, this is all I ask from Thee, O my God! I will love Thee, I will love Thee; and, in order to love Thee, I offer myself to undergo every fatigue, and to suffer every pain. O my Lord, increase in me always this desire, and give me the grace to execute it. Of myself I can do nothing, but assisted by Thee I can do all things. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ graciously hear me. My Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion, come to my succour. O Mary, my hope! for the love of Jesus Christ, protect me.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

X. THE TRIALS WHICH WE MUST EXPECT TO HAVE IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

When, then, a person has actually entered Religion, however genuine his Vocation may be, and though he may have conquered all his passions and his earthly affections, let him not imagine that he will be exempt from other temptations and trials, which God Himself will send him, such as tediousness, darkness, various fears, in order to establish him more firmly in his Vocation. We must remember that even the Saints, who loved their Vocation most, have sometimes suffered great darkness with regard to it, and that it seemed to them that they were deceived, and would not be able to save themselves in that state. So it happened with St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Jane Frances de Chantal. But by recommending themselves to God, that darkness was dissipated, and they recovered their peace of mind. Thus the Lord tests His most beloved children, as it was

said to Tobias: *Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee* (Tob. xii. 13). And in the Book of Deuteronomy, *The Lord, your God, trieth you, that it may appear whether you love him or not* (Deut. xiii. 3). Let each one, therefore, prepare himself to suffer in Religion this obscurity. It will sometimes appear to him that he cannot bear the observance of the Order, that he will have no more peace of mind, or will not even be able to save himself. But, most of all, he must be on his guard when the temptation presents specious scruples or pretexts of greater spiritual good, in order to make him abandon his Vocation.

There are two principal remedies for such temptations:

First Remedy: To have Recourse to God.

Prayer is the first remedy: *Come ye to him and be enlightened* (Ps. xxxiii. 6). For, as it is not possible that temptation overcome one who has recourse to God by prayer, so he who does not recommend himself to God will surely be overcome. And let it be noted that sometimes it will not suffice to have recourse to God once, or for a few days, to be victorious. Perhaps the Lord will permit the temptation to continue, even after we have prayed for several weeks, months, and even years; but let us be assured that he who ceases not to recommend himself to God will certainly be enlightened and win the victory, and thereafter he will have more peace and be more firm in his Vocation.

Until we have passed through this storm, which for the most part comes to all, let no one of us think himself secure. Let us be persuaded, however, that in this time of temptation it is vain to expect to feel fervour, or a clearness of reason sufficient to tranquillise ourselves; for in the midst of the darkness we see nothing but confusion. At such a time we can only cry out: *O Lord, help me! O Lord, help me!* We should also have frequent recourse to Most Holy Mary, who is the Mother of perseverance. Let us confide in that divine promise: *Ask and you shall receive*. It is certain that he who, with the help of divine grace, is victorious in such a combat finds afterwards a double calm and peace in his Vocation.

Second Remedy: To have Recourse to the Superiors.

The second remedy, and a principal and necessary one in

such temptations, is to communicate to the Superiors, or to the Spiritual Father, the temptation which afflicts you, and this at once, before the temptation becomes strong. St. Philip Neri says that a temptation thus manifested is half conquered. On the contrary, there is no greater mistake than to conceal the temptation; for then, on the one hand, God withdraws His light because of the little fidelity shown by the subject in not disclosing it to those who hold His place, and, on the other, whilst the mine is not sprung, the temptation gains strength. Hence, it may be held for certain that he who is thus unfaithful when tempted against his Vocation, will surely lose it.

And let it be understood that in Religion these temptations against Vocation are the most pernicious that hell can raise against a subject, for, should he give way, the devil, with one stroke, will have gained many victories; for when a subject has lost his Vocation and left Religion, what good will he be able to do in the service of God? The enemy, it is true, will make him believe that out of Religion he will enjoy greater peace and be able to do more good; nevertheless, let him hold for certain that as soon as he has left the House of God he will feel such remorse that he will nevermore enjoy peace of conscience. And God grant that such a remorse may not torment him for all eternity in hell, into which, as has already been said, he who through his own fault loses his Vocation, may so easily fall. He will be so lukewarm and discouraged in doing good that he will not even have the strength to raise his eyes to Heaven. In such a state he will easily give up prayer altogether, because as often as he begins it he will feel a hell of remorse, hearing his conscience reproach him and saying: "What hast thou done? Thou hast abandoned God; thou hast lost thy Vocation; and for what? To follow thine own caprice; to please thy parents." Let him be certain that he will have to feel this remorse through his whole life, and still more so at the hour of his death, when, in sight of eternity, instead of dying in the House of God, and in the midst of his Brethren in Religion, he will die out of Religion, perhaps in his own house, in the midst of his relatives, to please whom he has displeased God. A Religious should ever beseech God to let him die rather than permit so great a misfortune to befall him,

the torments of which he will better understand at the point of death, because then there will be no remedy for the error. For him, then, who is tempted against his Vocation, the best Meditation he can make while it lasts, is to reflect what torment the remorse of having lost his Vocation, and of having to die out of Religion, through his own caprice, through his own fault, will cause him at the hour of his death.

Evening Meditation

GOD HAS MADE HIMSELF A CHILD TO GAIN OUR CONFIDENCE AND OUR LOVE.

I.

A child is born to us and a son is given to us (Is. ix. 6).

Consider how, after so many centuries, after so many prayers and sighs, the Messiah Whom the holy Patriarchs and Prophets were not worthy to see, for Whom the nations sighed, *the desire of the eternal hills*, our Saviour, is come! He is already born and has given Himself entirely to us. *A child is born to us, and a son is given to us* (Is. ix. 6).

The Son of God has made Himself little, in order to make us great; He has given Himself to us, in order that we may give ourselves to Him; He is come to show us His love, in order that we may respond to it by giving Him ours. Let us, therefore, receive Him with affection; let us love Him, and have recourse to Him in all our necessities.

"A child gives easily," says St. Bernard; children readily give anything that is asked of them. Jesus came into the world as a Child, in order to show Himself ready and willing to give us all good gifts: *In whom are hid all treasures* (Col. ii. 3). *The Father hath given all things into his hands* (Jo. iii. 35). If we wish for light, He is come on purpose to enlighten us. If we wish for strength to resist our enemies, He is come to give us comfort. If we wish for pardon and salvation, He is come to pardon and save us. If, in short, we desire the sovereign gift of Divine love, He is come to inflame our hearts with it; and, above all, for this very purpose, He has become a Child, and has chosen to show Himself to us worthy of our love, in proportion as He was poor and humble, in order to take away from us all fear, and to gain our affections. "Thus," says St. Peter Chrysologus "should He come Who willed to drive

away fear, and seek for love."

O my amiable Jesus, Whom I have treated with so much contempt, Thou hast descended from Heaven to rescue us from hell, and to give Thyself entirely to us -- how can we, then, have so often despised Thee and turned our backs upon Thee? O God! men are so grateful to their fellow-creatures, that if anyone makes them a gift, if any one comes from a distance to pay them a visit, if anyone shows them a mark of affection, they cannot forget it, and feel themselves obliged to make him a return. And yet they are so ungrateful towards Thee, Who art their God, and so amiable, and Who for their love didst not refuse Thy Blood and Thy life. But, alas! I have behaved worse than others towards Thee, because more loved by Thee, and yet I have been more ungrateful towards Thee. Ah, if Thou hadst bestowed the graces given to me on a heretic, on an idolater, he would have become a Saint! And yet I have only offended Thee! O Jesus, mercy!

II.

Jesus has, besides, chosen to become a little Child to make us love Him, not only with an appreciative but with a tender love. All infants attract the tender affections of those who behold them; but who will not, then, love with all tenderness a God Whom they behold as a little Child, in need of milk, trembling with cold, poor, abased and forsaken, weeping and wailing, and lying on straw in a manger? It was this that made the enamoured St. Francis exclaim: "Let us love the Child of Bethlehem! Let us love the Child of Bethlehem!" Come, ye souls, and love a God Who is become a Child and poor; Who is so amiable, and Who has come down from Heaven to give Himself entirely to you.

Forget, O Lord, I pray Thee, the injuries I have done Thee. But Thou hast already said that when a sinner repents, Thou forgettest all the outrages Thou hast received from him: *All his iniquities I will not remember* (Ezech. xviii. 22). If in times past I have not loved Thee, in future I will do nothing but love Thee, Thou hast given Thyself all to me, I will give Thee my entire will. With this will I love Thee, love Thee, love Thee; and I repeat it, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee. While I live I will constantly say this; and thus shall I die, saying with my last breath those sweet words: "My God, I love Thee." And in the meantime, O

my Lord, my only Good, my only Love, I intend to prefer Thy Will to every pleasure of my own. Let the whole world offer itself to me, I will refuse, for I will never cease to love Him Who has loved me so much. I will never again offend Him Who deserves from me an infinite love. Do Thou, O my Jesus, strengthen this my desire with Thy grace. Mary, my Queen, I acknowledge that all the graces that I have received from God are due to thy intercession. Cease not to intercede for me. Obtain for me perseverance, thou who art the Mother of perseverance.

Friday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. X.

Consider the love we owe to Jesus Christ in return for the love He has shown us.

In order to understand the love the Son of God has borne us it is enough to consider what St. Paul says of Jesus Christ: *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* O my Jesus, only too much, indeed, hast Thou obliged me to love Thee.

I.

He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. He emptied Himself! O God! what astonishment to the Angels, through all eternity, to see a God become Man for the love of man, and submit to all man's weaknesses and sufferings. *And the Word was made flesh!* What a marvel would it not be to see a king become a worm for the sake of worms! But it is an infinitely greater wonder to see a God become Man, and then humbled unto such a painful and ignominious death on the Cross upon which He ended His most sacred life.

Moses and Elias, on Mount Thabor, speaking of His death, as it is related in the Gospel, called it an "excess": *They spoke of his decease* (the Latin word is "excessus," which also means "excess") *that he should accomplish in Jerusalem* (Luke ix. 31). Yes, says St. Bonaventure, it is with reason the death of Jesus Christ was called an "excess," for it was an excess of suffering and of love -- *Excessus doloris, excessus amoris*. So much so that it would be impossible to believe it, if it had not already happened. It was truly an

excess of love, adds St. Augustine, for to this end the Son of God wished to come on earth, to live a life so laborious and to die a death so bitter, namely, that He might make known to man how much He loved him. "Therefore Christ came, that man should know how much God loved him."

The Lord revealed to His servant Armella Nicolas that the love He bore to man was the cause of all His sufferings and of His death. If Jesus Christ had not been God, but only man and our Friend, what greater love could He have shown us than to die for us? *Greater love than this, no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jo. xv. 13). At the thought of the love shown us by Jesus Christ, how little the Saints esteemed it to give their lives and their all for so loving a God! How many youths, how many noblemen, have left their house, their country, their riches, their parents, and all things to retire into cloisters, to live only for the love of Jesus Christ! How many young virgins, renouncing nuptials with princes and the great ones of the world, have gone joyfully to death, thus to render some return for the love of a God Who had been executed on an infamous gibbet and died for their sake.

Indeed, O my Jesus, my Lord, and my Redeemer! only too much hast Thou obliged me to love Thee; too much has my love cost Thee. I should be too ungrateful if I should content myself to love with reserve a God Who has given me His Blood, His life, and His entire self. Oh, Thou Who hast died for me, Thy poor servant, it is but just that I should die for Thee, my God, and my All. Yes, O my Jesus! I detach myself from all, to give myself to Thee. I put away from me the love of all creatures in order to consecrate myself entirely to Thy love.

II.

That Jesus Christ should die on the Cross for our sakes seemed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to be "foolishness." Hence she said Jesus was foolish with love: "O my Jesus, Thou art foolish with love!" So, also, the Gentiles, as St. Paul attests, on hearing the death of Jesus Christ preached to them, considered it a folly that no one could believe. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23). How is it possible, they said, that a God Who is in Himself

most happy and is dependant on none, should die for the love of man, His own servant?

This would be as much as to believe that God became a fool for the love of men. Nevertheless, it is of Faith that Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, did, for love of us, deliver Himself up to death. *He hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). The same St. Mary Magdalen had reason then to exclaim, lamenting the ingratitude of men towards so loving a God: "O Love not known! O Love not loved!" Indeed, Jesus Christ is not loved by men, because they live in forgetfulness of His love.

And, in fact, a soul that considers a God Who died for her sake, cannot live without loving Him. *The charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14). The soul will feel herself inflamed, and as if constrained to love a God Who has loved her so much. Jesus Christ could have saved us, says Father Nieremberg, with one single drop of His Blood; but it was His will to shed all His Blood, and to give His Divine Life, that at the sight of so many sufferings and of His death, we might not content ourselves with an ordinary love, but be sweetly constrained to love with all our strength a God so full of love towards us. *That they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them* (Ib. v. 15).

O my Jesus, I choose Thee alone out of all things for my Good, my Treasure, and my only Love. I love Thee, O my Love! I love Thee. Thou art not satisfied that I should love Thee only a little. Thou art not willing to have me love anything besides Thee. I will please Thee in all things and I will love Thee much. Thou shalt be my only Love. My God, my God, help me, that I may fully please Thee. Mary, my Queen, do thou also help me that I may have a great love for my God. Amen. So I hope; so may it be.

Spiritual Reading

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

XI. CONCLUSION

Finally, let him who wishes to enter Religion resolve to become a Saint, and to suffer every exterior and interior pain in order to be faithful to God, and not to lose his Vocation. And if he be not thus resolved, I exhort him not to deceive the Supe-

riors and himself, and not to enter at all, for this is a sign that he is not called, or, which is a still greater evil, that he has not the will to correspond as he ought, with the grace of his Vocation. Hence, with so bad a disposition, it is better to remain in the world, there to dispose himself better, so as to give himself entirely to God, and to suffer all for Him. Otherwise he will do an injury both to himself and to Religion, for he will leave for the least cause, and then, besides being discredited before the world, he will be guilty before God of a still further infidelity to his Vocation, and will lose all hope of being able to take a single step in the way of God. God alone knows into what other misfortunes and sins he may fall.

To sum up. What a beautiful sight to see in Religion souls wholly given to God, who live in the world as if out of the world, without any other thought than that of pleasing God.

In Religion each one has to live only for eternity. What happiness for us if we spend these few days of our life for God! And to this he is most especially obliged who has perhaps already spent much of his life in the service of the world. Let us set eternity before our eyes, and then we shall suffer everything in peace and joy.

Let us thank God Who gives us so much light and so many means to serve Him perfectly, since He has chosen us, from among so many, to serve Him in Religion -- having bestowed on us the gift of His holy love. Let us make haste to advance in virtue in order to please Him, reflecting that, perhaps, as St. Teresa said to her daughters, "we have already by His grace got over the chief difficulty in the way of becoming Saints when we turned our backs on the world and all its goods; that which is less difficult remains for us to do, and then we shall be Saints." I hold it for certain that for those who die in Religion, Jesus Christ has prepared a beautiful place in Paradise. In this world we shall be poor, despised, and looked upon as fools and imprudent persons, but in the next our lot will be far different.

Let us always recommend ourselves to our most loving Redeemer, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin, for Religious must profess a most special love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and for His Immaculate Mother Mary.

Let us have great confidence. Jesus Christ has chosen us to be princes of His court, and all Religious Orders, and each member of them, are indeed objects of His special care. *The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?* (Ps. xxvi. 1).

O Lord! perfect Thy work, and, for Thy glory, make us all Thine own, so that all the members of Thy Orders may, until the Day of Judgment, be pleasing to Thee, and gain for Thee a countless number of souls. Amen, Amen.

Evening Meditation

JESUS OFFERED HIMSELF FOR OUR SALVATION FROM THE BEGINNING.

I.

He was offered because it was his own will (Is. liii. 7).

The divine Word, from the first instant that He was made Man and an Infant in Mary's womb, offered Himself of His own accord to suffer and to die for the ransom of the world: *He was offered because it was his own will* (Is. liii. 7). He knew that all the sacrifices of goats and bulls offered to God in times past had not been able to satisfy for the sins of men, but that it required a divine Person to pay the price of their redemption; wherefore He said, as the Apostle tells us: *When he cometh into the world he saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me ... Then said I: Behold, I come* (Heb. x. 5). "My Father," said Jesus, "all the victims hitherto offered to Thee have not sufficed, nor could they suffice, to satisfy Thy justice; Thou hast given Me this passible body, in order that by shedding my Blood I might appease Thee and save men: *Behold, I come* -- here I am ready, I accept everything, and I submit myself in everything to Thy will."

My Lord, ever since I began to have the use of reason, I began to despise Thy grace and Thy love. Nevertheless Thou hast borne with me, because Thou still dost love me. I fled from Thee, and Thou dost follow me and call me. The very same love that made Thee come down from Heaven to seek the lost sheep, has caused Thee to bear with me, and not to forsake me. My Jesus, Thou seekest me now, and I seek Thee. I feel that Thy grace is assisting me: it assists me by giving me sorrow for my sins, which I abhor above every other evil; it assists me by making

me feel a great desire to love Thee and to please Thee. Yes, my Lord, I will love Thee and please Thee as much as I can. On the one hand I feel afraid, it is true, at the thought of my frailty and the weakness which I have contracted by my sins; but greater is the confidence which Thy grace gives me, making me hope in Thy merits; so that I say, with great courage: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13). If I am weak Thou wilt give me strength against my enemies: if I am infirm, I hope that Thy Blood will be my medicine; if I am a sinner, I hope Thou wilt make me holy. I know that I have hitherto contributed to my own ruin, because I have neglected, in times of danger, to have recourse to Thee. But from this day forth, my Jesus and my Hope, I will always have recourse to Thee; and from Thee I hope for every assistance and every good.

II.

In Jesus the inferior part felt repugnance towards a life of suffering and a death so full of pain and shame; but the rational part, which was entirely subordinate to the will of His Father, conquered and accepted everything; and Jesus began from the Incarnation to suffer all the anguish and sorrows that He would have to suffer all the years of His life. Thus did our Redeemer act from the very first moment of His entrance into the world. But, O God, how have we conducted ourselves towards Jesus since we began as adults to know by the light of Faith the Sacred Mysteries of Redemption? What thoughts, what designs, what goods have we loved? Pleasures, amusements, vanities, resentments, sensuality -- these are the things that have engrossed the affections of our hearts. But if we have Faith, we must now at last change our lives and change our affections. Let us love a God Who has suffered so much for us. Let us place before ourselves the sufferings which the Heart of Jesus endured for us, even from His Infancy; for then we shall not be able to love anything else but this Heart which has loved us so much.

O my Jesus, now I love Thee above all things, and I will love none but Thee. In pity help me, through the merit of all those sufferings which from Thy infancy Thou hast endured for me. Eternal Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ accept my love. If I have provoked Thee let the tears of the Infant Jesus, Who is

praying for me, appease Thy wrath: *Look on the face of thy Christ* (Ps. lxxxiii. 10). I do not deserve favours, but this Thy innocent Son deserves them, and offers Thee a life of sufferings, in order that Thou mayst be merciful to me. And thou, O Mother of mercy, Mary, cease not to intercede for me. Thou knowest how much I confide in thee; and I well know that thou dost not forsake him that has recourse to thee.

Saturday--Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. XI.

Consider how much Religious ought to confide in the patronage of Mary.

The divine Mother loves all men. How much, then, does not this great Queen love Religious who have consecrated their liberty, their life, and their all to the love of Jesus Christ, her Son? My happiness on this earth, O Mary, shall be to serve, bless and to love thee.

If it be true, and most true, indeed, it is, that, as St. Peter Damian teaches, the divine Mother, most holy Mary, loves all men with such an affection that, after God; there is not, nor can there be, any one who surpasses or equals her in her love: "She loves us with an invincible love": how much must we think this great Queen loves Religious, who have consecrated their liberty, their life, and their all to the love of Jesus Christ? She well sees that the life of Religious is more conformable to her own life, and to that of her divine Son; she sees them often occupied in praising her, and continually attentive to honour her by their Novenas, Visits, Rosaries, Fasts, etc. She beholds them often at her feet, intent on invoking her aid, asking graces of her, and graces all conformed to her holy desires; that is, the grace of perseverance in the divine service, of strength in their temptations, of detachment from this world, and of love of God. Ah, how can we doubt that she employs all her power and mercy for the benefit of Religious, and especially of those who belong to this holy Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, in which, as it is well known, we make a special profession of honouring the Virgin Mother by Visits, by mortifications on Saturdays and during her

Novenas, etc. and by everywhere promoting devotion to her by sermons and Novenas!

I thank thee, O Mary, my advocate, for to thee do I owe this great mercy that I am consecrated to Jesus Christ in Religion. Help me that I may not be ungrateful to that God Who has loved me so much. Let me die rather than prove myself unfaithful to His holy grace. O Mary, I consign my soul to thee; thou hast to save it. I love thee, O my Queen, and I hope always to love thee. Behold, I place all my confidence in thy clemency; do not cease to assist me in all my wants. Thou art my hope, O Mary; I look for all things through thy powerful intercession.

II.

She, the great Mistress is grateful: *I love those who love me* (Prov. viii. 17). Yes, she is so grateful that, as St. Andrew of Crete says, "To him who does her the least service she is accustomed to return great favours." To those who love her, and who promote her honour among others, she graciously promises to save them from sin: *Those that work by me shall not sin*. She also promises them Paradise: *Those that explain me shall have life everlasting* (Office of the B. V. Mary).

For which reason we especially ought to thank God for having called us to this Congregation, where, by the usages of the Community and the example of our companions, we are often reminded, and in some way constrained, to have recourse to Mary, and continually to honour this, our most blessed Mother, who is called, and is, the joy, the hope, the life, and the salvation of those who invoke and honour her.

My most beloved, most lovely, amiable, and most loving Queen, I thank my Lord and thee, and will always thank thee, who hast not only drawn me out of the world, but also called me to live in this Congregation, in which a special devotion to thee is practised. Accept of me, then, my Mother, to serve thee. Among so many of thy beloved children, disdain not to let me serve thee also, miserable though I be. Thou after God shall always be my hope and my love. In all my wants, in all my tribulations and temptations I will have recourse to thee; thou shalt be my refuge and my consolation. I will not that any one except God and thee should comfort me in my combats, in the sadness and the

tediousness of this life. For thy service I renounce the kingdoms of the whole world! My kingdom on earth shall be to serve, bless, and love thee, O my most lovely Mistress, "whom to serve is to reign" as St. Anselm says. Thou art the Mother of perseverance; obtain for me to be faithful unto death. By so doing I hope, and firmly hope, one day to come where thou reignest, to praise and bless thee forever, and never more to depart from thy feet. "Jesus and Mary," I will say with thy loving servant, Alphonsus Rodriguez, "my sweetest Loves, let me suffer for You, let me die for You, let me be all Yours, and in nothing my own."

Spiritual Reading

ON DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

My beloved reader and brother in Mary: Since the devotion that led me to write, and moves you to read what I write, makes us happy children of the same good Mother, should you hear it remarked that I might have spared myself the labour, as there are already so many celebrated and learned books on the same subject, I beg that you will reply that "the praise of Mary is an inexhaustible fount. The more it is enlarged the fuller it gets, and the more you fill it so much the more is it enlarged." In short, the Blessed Virgin is so great and so sublime, that the more she is praised the more there remains to praise; so much so, says an ancient writer, "that if all the tongues of men were put together, and even if each of their members were changed into a tongue, they would not suffice to praise her as much as she deserves."

Worldly lovers often speak of those whom they love, and praise them in order that the object of their affections may be praised and extolled by others. There are some who pretend to be lovers of Mary, and yet seldom either speak of her or endeavour to excite others to love her; their love cannot be great. It is not thus that true lovers of this amiable Lady act; they desire to praise her on all occasions, and to see her loved by the whole world, and never lose an opportunity, either in public or in private, of enkindling in the hearts of others those blessed flames of love with which they themselves burn towards their beloved Queen.

That every one may be persuaded how important it is, both for his own good and that of others, to promote devotion towards

Mary, it is useful to know what Theologians say on the subject.

St. Bonaventure says that those who make a point of announcing to others the glories of Mary, are certain of Heaven; and this opinion is confirmed by Richard of St. Laurence, who declares, "that to honour this Queen of Angels is to gain eternal life"; and he adds, "that this most gracious Lady will honour in the next world those who honour her in this." And who is ignorant of the promise made by Mary herself, in the words of Ecclesiasticus, to those who endeavour to make her known and loved here below: *they that explain me shall have life-everlasting*; for this passage is applied to her by the Church, in the Office of the Immaculate Conception. "Rejoice, then," exclaims St. Bonaventure (who did so much to make the glories of Mary known), "rejoice, my soul, and be glad in her; for many good things are prepared for those who praise her." And he says that the whole of the Sacred Scriptures speak in praise of Mary: let us therefore always with our hearts and tongues honour this divine Mother, in order that we may be conducted by her into the kingdom of the Blessed.

We learn from the Revelations of St. Bridget, that the Blessed Bishop Emingo was in the habit of always beginning his sermons with the praises of Mary. One day the Blessed Virgin herself appeared to the Saint, and desired her to tell him that in consequence of his pious practice, "she would be his Mother, that he would die a holy death, and that she would herself present his soul to God." He died like a Saint in the act of praying, and in the most heavenly peace. Mary also appeared to a Dominican friar, who always concluded his sermons by speaking of her; when on his death bed, the Blessed Virgin defended him from devils, consoled him, and then she herself carried off his happy soul. The devout Thomas a Kempis, represents to us Mary recommending a soul who had honoured her to her Son, saying: "My most loving Son, have mercy on the soul of this servant of Thine, who loved and extolled me."

Next, as to the advantage of this devotion for all, St. Anselm says, that as the most sacred womb of Mary was the means of salvation for sinners, the hearing of her praises must necessarily convert them, and thus be also a means of their salvation. "How

can it be otherwise than that the salvation of sinners should come from the remembrance of her praises, whose womb was made the way through which the Saviour came to save sinners?" And if the opinion is true, and I consider it as indubitably so, that all graces are dispensed by Mary, and that all who are saved are saved only by means of this divine Mother, it is a necessary consequence that the salvation of all depends upon preaching Mary, and exciting all to confidence in her intercession.*

I find that Father Paul Segneri, the Younger, who was a very celebrated missionary, in every Mission preached a sermon on devotion to Mary, and always called it his *beloved sermon*. And in our own Missions, in which it is an inviolable rule to do the same, we can attest, with all truth, that in most cases no sermon is more profitable, or produces so much compunction in the hearts of the people, as the one on the Mercy of Mary. I say, on her *Mercy*, for, in the words of St. Bernard: "we praise her Virginity, we admire her Humility; but because we are poor sinners, *Mercy* attracts us more and tastes sweeter; we embrace it more lovingly; we remember it oftener, and invoke it more earnestly." Devout reader, should what I write on the Blessed Virgin prove acceptable to you, as I trust it will, I beg that you will recommend me to Mary, that she may give me great confidence in her protection. Ask this grace for me; and I promise you, whoever you may be, that I will ask the same for you who do me this charity. O, blessed are they who bind themselves with love and confidence to those two anchors of salvation, Jesus and Mary. Certainly they will not be lost. Let us then say with the pious Alphonsus Rodriguez: "Jesus and Mary, my sweetest Loves, for You may I suffer, for You may I die; grant that I may be in all things Yours and in nothing mine own." Let us love Jesus and Mary and become Saints; we can neither expect nor hope anything better.

*There has recently been granted by the Holy Church a Feast under the title of "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces." -- EDITOR.

Evening Meditation

JESUS A PRISONER IN THE WOMB OF MARY

I.

I am become as a man without help, free among the dead (Ps.

lxxxvii. 5, 6).

Consider the painful life that Jesus led in the womb of His Mother, and the long, close and dark imprisonment that He suffered there for nine months. Other infants are, indeed, in the same state, but they do not feel the miseries of it because they do not know them. But Jesus knew them well, because from the first moment of His life He had the perfect use of His reason, He had His senses, but He could not use them; eyes, but He could not see; a tongue, but He could not speak; hands, but He could not stretch them out; feet, but He could not walk -- so that for nine months He had to remain in the womb of Mary like a dead man shut up in the tomb: *I am become as a man without help, free among the dead* (Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 6). He was free, because He had of His own free-will made Himself a Prisoner of love in this prison; but love deprived Him of liberty, and bound Him there so fast in chains that He could not move: *Free among the dead!* "Oh great patience of our Saviour!" says St. Ambrose, while he considered the sufferings of Jesus in the womb of Mary.

Forget not the kindness of thy surety (Ecclus. xxix. 19). Yes, my Jesus, the Prophet has reason to warn me not to forget the immense favour in that Thou the innocent One, Thou, O my God! hast chosen to satisfy for my sins by Thy sufferings and Thy death. But after all this kindness I have forgotten Thy favours and Thy love, and I have had the boldness to turn my back upon Thee, as if Thou hadst not been my Lord, and the Lord Who has loved me so much. But if in times past I have forgotten Thy mercies, O my dear Redeemer! I will in future never forget them again. Thy sufferings and death shall be the constant subjects of my thoughts, because they will always recall to my mind the love that Thou hast borne me. Cursed be the days in which, forgetting what Thou hast suffered for me, I have made so bad a use of my liberty. Thou hast given it to me to love Thee, and I have used it to despise Thee. But I now consecrate entirely to Thee this liberty which Thou hast given me.

II.

The womb of Mary was, therefore, to our Redeemer, a voluntary prison, because it was a prison of love. But it was also not an unjust prison: He was, indeed, innocent Himself, but He had

offered Himself to pay our debts and to satisfy for our crimes. It was, therefore, only reasonable for the divine justice to keep Him thus imprisoned, and so begin to exact from Him the satisfaction due.

Behold the state to which the Son of God reduces Himself for the love of men! He deprives Himself of His liberty and puts Himself in chains to deliver us from the chains of hell. What gratitude and love should we not show in return for the love and goodness of our deliverer and our surety, Who, not by compulsion, but only out of love, offered Himself to pay, and has paid for us, our debts and our penalties by giving up His divine life! *Forget not the kindness of thy surety; for he hath given his life for thee* (Ecclus. xxix. 19).

I beseech Thee, my Saviour, deliver me from the misery of seeing myself again separated from Thee, and again made the slave of Lucifer. I implore Thee to bind my poor soul to Thy feet by Thy holy love, so that it may never again be separated from Thee. Eternal Father, by the imprisonment of the Infant Jesus in the womb of Mary, deliver me from the chains of sin and hell. And thou, O Mother of God, help me! Thou hast in thy womb the Son of God imprisoned and confined; as, therefore, Jesus is thy Prisoner, He will do everything that thou tellest Him. Tell Him to pardon me; tell Him to make me holy. Help me, my Mother, for the sake of the favour and honour Jesus Christ conferred upon thee by dwelling within thee for nine months.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation

THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Gospel of Sunday. Luke iii. 1-6).

The Saviour of the world, Whom, according to the Prophet Isaias, men were to see one day on the earth -- *and all flesh shall see the salvation of God* -- has come. And He came on earth, says St. Augustine, that men might know how much God loves them. And how is it, O my dear Jesus, that Thou dost meet with so much ingratitude from the greater number of men?

I.

Adam, our first father, sins, and is condemned to eternal death along with all his posterity. Seeing the whole human race doomed to perdition, God resolved to send a Redeemer to save mankind. Who shall come to be man's salvation? Perhaps an Angel or a Seraph? No, the Son of God, the supreme and true God, equal to the Father, offers Himself to come on earth, and there to take human flesh and die for the salvation of men. O prodigy of divine love! Man, says St. Fulgentius, despises God and separates himself from God, and through love for him God comes on earth to seek after rebellious man. Since we would not go to our Physician, He deigned to come to us, says St. Augustine. And why did Jesus resolve to come to us? Christ came, says the same holy Doctor, that man might know how much God loves him.

Hence the Apostle writes: *The goodness and kindness of God, our Saviour, appeared* (Tit. iii. 4). The singular love of God towards men appeared, as the Greek Text has it. And what greater love and goodness could the Son of God show us than to become Man and a worm like us, in order to save us from perdition? What astonishment should we not feel if we saw a prince become a worm to save the worms of his kingdom! And what shall we say at the sight of a God made Man like us to deliver us from eternal death! *The Word was made flesh* (Jo. i. 14). A God made flesh! If Faith did not assure us of it, who could ever believe it?

O my sweet, amiable, holy Child, Thou art at a loss to know what more to do to make Thyself loved by men! It is enough to say that from being the Son of God, Thou Wert made the Son of man, and that Thou didst choose to be born among men like the rest of infants, only poorer and more meanly lodged than the rest, selecting a stable for Thy abode, a manger for Thy cradle, a little straw for Thy bed. And yet few there are who know Thee! Few there are who love Thee!

II.

Tell me, O Christian, what more could Jesus Christ have done to win Thy love? If the Son of God had engaged to rescue from death His own Father, what lower humiliation could He have stooped to than to assume human flesh and to lay down His life in sacrifice for His salvation? Nay, I say more, had Jesus Christ been a mere man instead of One of the Divine Persons,

and wished to gain by some token of affection the love of His God, what more could He have done than He has done for thee? If a servant of thine had given for thy love his very life-blood would he not have riveted thy heart to him, and obliged thee to love him out of mere gratitude? And how comes it that Jesus Christ, though He has laid down His very life for thee, has still failed to win thy love?

Men appreciate the good graces of a prince, of a prelate, a nobleman, of a man of letters, and even of a vile animal, and yet these same persons set no store by the grace of God -- but renounce it for mere smoke, for a brutal gratification, for a handful of earth, for a whim, for a nothing! What sayest thou, my dear brother? Dost thou wish still to be ranked among the ungrateful ones? Go, seek for thyself one who is better able than God to make thee happy in the present life and in the life to come. Go, find thyself a prince more courteous, a master, a brother, a friend more amiable, and who has shown thee a deeper love. *O Lord, who is like to thee?* (Ps. xxxiv. 10). O Lord, what greatness shall ever be found like to Thine?

Love, then, love, O souls, love this little Child, exclaims St. Bernard, for He is exceedingly to be loved. Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised! The Lord is a little One and exceedingly to be loved!

O my dear Jesus, how is it that Thou dost encounter such ingratitude from the greater number of men? In the time past, I, too, have not known Thee; but heedless of Thy love, I have sought my own gratification, making no account whatever of Thee and of Thy friendship. But now I am sorry for it. I grieve over it with my whole heart. O my sweet Child, and my God, forgive me for the sake of Thy Infancy. Thou knowest my past treasons; for pity's sake do not abandon me or I shall fall away even worse than before. O Mary, great Mother of the Incarnate Word, do not thou abandon me! Thou art the Mother of perseverance and the stewardess of divine grace. With thy help, O my hope, I trust to be faithful to my God till death.

Spiritual Reading

JOSEPH AND MARY AT BETHLEHEM

Octavius Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, wishing to know

the strength of his empire, decreed that there be a general numbering of all his subjects; and for this purpose he ordered the governors of all the provinces -- and, among the rest, Cyrinus, governor of Judea -- to make every one come to enroll himself, and at the same time pay a certain tribute as a sign of vassalage: *There went out a decree ... that the whole world should be enrolled* (Luke ii. 1). As soon as this decree was promulgated, Joseph obeys immediately; he does not even wait till his holy spouse should be delivered, though the time is near. I say he obeyed immediately, and set out on his journey with Mary, then pregnant with the Divine Word, to go and enrol himself in the City of Bethlehem: *to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child* (Luke ii. 5). The journey was a long one -- for, according to some authors, it was ninety leagues; that is, four days' journey -- long and difficult, for they had to traverse mountains and steep paths, through the wind, the rain and the cold.

When a king makes his first entry into a city of his kingdom, what honours are not prepared for him! What preparations are not made, and triumphal arches erected! Do thou, then, O happy Bethlehem! prepare thyself to receive thy King with honour; for the Prophet Micheas has told thee that He is coming to thee, and that He is Lord, not only of all Judea, but of the whole world. And know, says the Prophet, thou, out of all the cities of the earth, art the fortunate one that has been chosen by the King of Heaven for His birthplace, that He may afterwards reign, not indeed in Judea, but in the hearts of men who live in Judea and in all the rest of the world: *And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall he come forth that is to be Ruler in Israel* (Mich. v. 2). But behold these two illustrious pilgrims, Joseph and Mary, who bears within her womb the Saviour of the world, are about to enter into Bethlehem. They enter and go to the house of the imperial minister to pay the tribute, and to enrol themselves in the book as subjects of Caesar, where they also inscribed the offspring of Mary, namely, Jesus Christ, Who was the Lord of Caesar and of all the princes of the earth. But who acknowledges them? Who goes before them to show them honour? Who salutes them, and who receives them? *He came unto his own, and his own received him not*

(John i. 11). They travel like poor people, and as such they are despised; they are treated even worse than the other poor, and are driven away. Yes; for *it came to pass when they were there her days were accomplished that she should be delivered* (Luke ii. 6). Mary knew that the time of her delivery was come, and that it was here, and on this night, that the Incarnate Word willed to be born, and to manifest Himself to the world. She therefore told Joseph, and he hastened to procure some lodgings in the houses of the townspeople, so as not to take his spouse to the inn to be delivered, as it was not a becoming place for her to be; besides which, it was then full of people. But Joseph found no one to listen to him; and very likely he was insulted, and perhaps called a fool by some of them, for taking his wife about at that time of night, and in such a crowd of people, when she was near her delivery; so that at last he was obliged, unless he would remain all night in the street, to take her to the public inn, where there were many other people lodging that night. He went there; but they were refused admittance even there, and they were told that there was no room for them: *There was no room for them in the inn* (Luke ii. 7). Room was found for all, even for the lowest, but not for Jesus Christ.

That inn was a figure of those ungrateful hearts where many find room for miserable creatures, but not for God. How many love their relatives, their friends, even animals, but do not love Jesus Christ, and care neither for His grace nor His love! But the ever-blessed Mary said once to a devout soul: "It was the dispensation of God that neither I nor my Son should find a lodging amongst men, that those souls who love Jesus might offer themselves as a lodging-place, and might affectionately invite Him to come into their hearts."

These poor travellers, then, seeing themselves repulsed on every side, leave the city to try and find some place of refuge without its walls. They walk on in the dark; they go round about and examine, till at last they see a grotto, which was cut out of stone in the mountain under the city. Barradas, Bede, and Brocardus say that the place where Jesus Christ was born was a rock that had been excavated under the walls of Bethlehem, divided off from the city, and like a cavern, which served as a stable for cattle. When they came to it Mary said to Joseph: "There is no

occasion to go any farther; let us go into this cave and remain here." "What!" replied Joseph, "my spouse, dost thou not see that this cave is quite exposed; that it is cold and damp, and that water is running down on all sides? Dost thou not see that it is no lodging for men, but it is a shed for beasts? How canst thou stop here all night and be delivered here?" Then Mary said: "It is nevertheless true that this stable is the royal palace in which the Eternal Son of God desires to be born on earth."

Oh, what must the Angels have said when they saw the divine Mother enter into this cave to bring forth her Son! The sons of princes are born in rooms adorned with gold; they have cradles enriched with precious stones, fine clothes, a retinue of the first lords of the kingdom; and has the King of Heaven nothing but a cold stable, without a fire, to be born in, some poor swaddling clothes to cover Him, a little straw for His bed, and a vile manger in which to lie? "Where is the palace," asks St. Bernard, "where is the throne?" Where, says the Saint, is the court, where is the royal palace for this King of Heaven? for I see nothing but two animals to keep Him company, and a manger for cattle, where He must be laid. O happy grotto, that witnessed the birth of the Divine Word! Happy manger to have had the honour of receiving the Lord of Heaven! Happy straw which served as a bed to Him Who sits on the shoulders of the Seraphim! Ah, when we think of the birth of Jesus Christ, and of the manner in which it took place, we ought all to be inflamed with love; and when we hear the names of cave, manger, straw, milk, tears, in reference to the birth of our Redeemer, these names ought to be so many incitements to our love, and arrows to wound our hearts. Yes, happy was that grotto, that crib, that straw; but still happier are those souls who love this amiable Lord with fervour and tenderness, and who receive Him in Holy Communion into hearts burning with love. Oh, with what desire and pleasure does not Jesus Christ enter into and repose in a heart that loves Him!

Evening Meditation

THE ETERNAL WORD BECOMES LITTLE.

I.

He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 7).

St. Paul says that Jesus Christ, coming on earth, *emptied Himself*. He annihilated Himself, so to say. And why? To save man and to be loved by man. "Where Thou didst empty Thyself," says St. Bernard, "there, did Mercy and Charity more brilliantly appear." Yes, my dear Redeemer, in proportion as Thy abasement was great in becoming Man and in being born an Infant, so were Thy mercy and love shown to be greater towards us, and this with a view to win over our hearts to Thyself.

Although the Jews, by so many signs and wonders, had a certain knowledge of the true God, they were not, however, satisfied; they wished to behold Him face to face. God found means to comply even with this desire of men; He became Man, to make Himself visible to them. "Knowing," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "that mortals felt an anguish of desire to see Him, God chose this method of making Himself visible to them." And to render Himself still more attractive in our eyes, He would make His first appearance as a little Child, that thus He might be the more charming and irresistible; He showed Himself an Infant, that He might make Himself more acceptable in our eyes. "Yes," adds St. Cyril of Alexandria, "He abased Himself to the humble condition of a little Child in order to make Himself more agreeable to our hearts." "For our advantage was this emptying made." For this, indeed, was the form most suitable to win our love.

The Prophet Ezechiel rightly exclaimed that the time of Thy coming on earth, O Incarnate Word, should be a time of love, the season of lovers: *Behold, thy time was the time of lovers* (Ezech. xvi. 8). And what object had God in loving us thus ardently, and of giving us such clear proofs of His love, other than that we might love Him? "God loves only in order to be loved," says St. Bernard. God Himself had already said as much: *And now, O Israel, what does the Lord, thy God require of thee, but that thou fear and love him* (Deut. x. 12).

O my sweet, amiable, holy Child, Thy first appearance before us is as a poor Infant, that even from birth Thou might-

est lose no time in attracting our hearts towards Thee. And so didst Thou go on through the remainder of Thy life ever showing us fresh and more striking tokens of Thy love, so that at length Thou didst shed the last drop of Thy Blood and die overwhelmed with shame upon the infamous tree of the Cross. And how is it, O Jesus, that Thou couldst have encountered such ingratitude from the majority of mankind? I see few, indeed, that know Thee, and fewer still that love Thee. Ah, my dear Jesus, I, too, desire to be among this small number. O, my sweet Child and my God, forgive me. I love Thee! I love Thee!

II.

In order to force us to love Him God would not commission others, but chose to come Himself in person to be made Man and to redeem us. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection on these words of the Apostle: *For nowhere doth he take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold* (Heb. ii. 16). Why, asks the Saint, did he not say *received*, but rather *taketh hold*? Why did not St. Paul simply say that God assumed human flesh? Why would he affirm with marked emphasis that He took it, as it were, by force, according to the strict meaning of the Latin *apprehendit*? He answers that he spoke thus, making use of the metaphor of those who give chase to those who are fleeing away. By this he would convey the idea that God always longed to be loved by man, but man turned his back upon Him, and cared not even to know of His love; therefore God came from Heaven, and took human flesh, to make Himself known in this way, and to make Himself loved, as it were, by force by ungrateful man who fled from Him.

For this, then, did the Eternal Word become Man; for this He, moreover, became an Infant. He could, indeed, have appeared upon this earth as a full-grown Man, as the first man, Adam, appeared. No, the Son of God wished to present Himself under the form of a sweet little Child, that thus He might the more readily and the more forcibly draw to Himself the love of man. Little children of themselves are loved at once; to see them and to love them is the same thing. Ah, my dear Jesus, it is true that in time past I did not know Thee. Heedless of Thy love I sought only my own gratification, making no account whatever

of Thee or of Thy friendship. But now I am conscious of the evil I have done. I am sorry for it and I grieve over it with my whole heart. I love Thee, Jesus, and that so dearly that even if I knew that all mankind were about to rebel against Thee and forsake Thee, yet would I not leave Thee though it should cost me a thousand lives. Accept, O Jesus, of my poor heart to love Thee. There was a time when it cared not for Thee, but now it is enamoured of Thy goodness, O Divine Infant. O Mary, O great Mother of the Word Incarnate, neither do thou abandon me. Thou art the Mother of perseverance and the stewardess of divine grace. Help me, then, and help me always. With thy aid, O my hope, I trust to be faithful to my God for ever. Amen.

Monday--Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. XII.

Consider the great happiness that Religious enjoy in dwelling in the same house with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

If worldlings deem it so great a favour to be invited by kings to dwell in their palaces, how much more favoured should we esteem ourselves who are admitted to dwell continually with the King of Heaven in His own house? O Lord, I thank Thee! How have I deserved this happy lot?

The Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, Foundress of a convent in Toulouse, said that she esteemed her lot as a Religious very much, and principally for two reasons. The first, that Religious, through the Vow of Obedience, belong entirely to God; and the second, that they have the privilege of dwelling always with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

In the houses of Religious, Jesus Christ dwells for their sake in the church, so that they can find Him at all hours. Persons of the world can scarcely go to visit Him during the day, and in many places, only in the morning. But Religious find Him in the Tabernacle as often as they wish, in the morning, in the afternoon, and during the night. There they may continually entertain themselves with Our Lord, and there Jesus Christ rejoices to converse familiarly with His beloved servants, whom, for this end, He has called out of Egypt, that He may be their Com-

panion during this life, hidden under the veil of the Most Holy Sacrament, and in the next, unveiled in Paradise. "O solitude," it may be said of every Religious house, "in which God familiarly speaks and converses with His friends!"

Behold me in Thy Presence, O my Jesus! -- hidden in the Sacrament, Thou art the self-same Jesus Who for me didst sacrifice Thyself on the Cross. Thou art He Who lovest me so much, and Who hast therefore confined Thyself in this prison of love. Amongst so many who have offended Thee less than I, and who have loved Thee better than I, Thou hast chosen me, in Thy goodness, to keep Thee company in this house, where, having drawn me from the midst of the world, Thou hast destined me always to live united with Thee, and afterwards to have me nigh to Thee to praise and to love Thee in Thy eternal kingdom. O Lord, I thank Thee. How have I deserved this happy lot? *I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, than dwell in the tabernacles of sinners* (Ps. lxxxiii. 11). Happy, indeed, am I, O my Jesus, to have left the world; and it is my great desire to perform the vilest office in Thy house rather than dwell in the proudest royal palaces of men.

II.

Souls that love Jesus Christ much know not how to wish for any other paradise on this earth than to be in the presence of their Lord, Who dwells in this Sacrament for the love of those who seek and visit Him.

Her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness (Wis. viii. 16). He who does not love Jesus Christ finds tediousness in His company. But those who on this earth have given all their love to Jesus Christ find in the Blessed Sacrament their treasure, their rest, their paradise, and therefore the great desire of their hearts is, as often as they can, to visit their God in this Sacrament, to pay their court to Him, offering Him their affections and laying at the foot of the altar their sorrows, their desire of loving Him, of seeing Him face to face, and, in the meantime, of pleasing Him in all things.

Receive me, then, O Lord, to stay with Thee all my life long; do not drive me away, as I deserve. Be pleased to allow that, among the many good Religious who serve Thee in this

house, I, though a miserable sinner, may serve Thee also. Many years already have I lived far from Thee. But now that Thou hast enlightened me to know the vanity of the world, and my own foolishness, I will not depart any more from Thy feet, O my Jesus! Thy presence shall animate me to fight when I am tempted. The nearness of Thy abode shall remind me of the obligation I am under to love Thee, and always to have recourse to Thee in my combats against hell. I will always keep near to Thee, that I may unite myself to Thee, and attach myself closer to Thee. I love Thee, O my God, hidden in this Sacrament. Thou, for the love of me, remainest always on this altar. I, for the love of Thee, will remain in Thy presence as much as I shall be able. There enclosed Thou always lovest me, and here enclosed I will always love Thee. Always then, O my Jesus, my Love, my All, shall we remain together -- in time in this House, and during eternity, in Paradise. This is my hope; so may it be. Most holy Mary, obtain for me a greater love for the Most Holy Sacrament.

Spiritual Reading

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES TO PERSEVERE IN THEIR VOCATION

There are two graces clearly distinct one from the other -- the grace of Vocation and the grace of Perseverance in one's Vocation. Many who have received a Vocation from God have afterwards, through their own fault, rendered themselves unworthy to receive the grace of Perseverance. *He is not crowned except he strive lawfully* (2 Tim. ii. 5). No one will receive the grace of Perseverance and the crown which God has prepared for him, who does not do what in him lies to fight and conquer his enemies: *Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown* (Apoc. iii. 11). My dear young friend, you who, by so special a favour, have been called by Our Lord to follow Him, hear how He exhorts and encourages you: "Be careful, My son, to preserve the grace which you have received from Me, and tremble lest you should lose it and another gain the crown which is prepared for you."

He who enters a Novitiate enters into the service of the King of Heaven, Who tries the fidelity of those whom He accepts for His own, by crosses and temptations, and permits the devil to

assail them. *Because thou wert acceptable to the Lord, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee* (Tob. xii. 13). And the Holy Ghost says to all who leave the world to give themselves to God: *My son, when thou comest to the service of God ... prepare thy soul for temptation* (Ecclus. ii. 1). So that the novice, on entering the House of God, ought to prepare himself, not for consolations, but for temptations, and for the war which the devil wages against those who give themselves wholly to God. And be well persuaded that the devil would rather tempt a novice to abandon his Vocation than a thousand seculars, especially if he enters an active Order. Yes, for the devil knows that if this novice perseveres and is faithful to God, hell will lose thousands of souls who will obtain salvation through his zeal. Hence, the enemy uses every means to win him and every device to beguile him.

The temptations by which the devil most frequently endeavours to induce novices to abandon their Vocation are the following.

I. TENDERNESS FOR PARENTS AND FRIENDS

First, he tempts them by tenderness for their parents. To resist this it is necessary to reflect on the declaration of Jesus Christ: *He who loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (Matt. x. 37). And He declares that He came not to send peace, but division. *I came not to send peace, but the sword; for I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother* (Matt. x. 34, 35). And why this great desire to separate relations from each other? Because Our Lord well knew the injury that comes from such intercourse, and that in the affairs of eternal salvation, especially where there is question of a Religious Vocation, there are no greater enemies than relations; and this Our Lord declared, saying: *A man's enemies shall be of his own household* (Matt. x. 36). O how many unhappy youths, through affection for their relations, have first lost their Vocations, and then, as so easily happens, their own souls. History is full of such sad instances. I will tell you of some. Father Jerome Piatti relates of a novice who was visited by a relation who said to him: "Listen to me; I only speak because I love you, and I beg you to reflect that your constitution is not fitted to undergo the labours and studies of the Religious life; by remaining in the

world you can please God better, especially by giving to the poor a large share of the riches with which He has blessed you. If you persist in your undertaking you will repent of it, for, in the end, with shame, you will be obliged to quit the Community, seeing yourself made porter or cook on account of your little talent and poor health. Therefore it is wiser to do at once that which you will be at last obliged to do." The poor young man, thus perverted, left the monastery, but many days had not elapsed before he fell into all kinds of vices; and in a quarrel with some of his rivals, he, together with the relation who had perverted him, was so severely wounded that within a short time they both died on the same day; and, what is still worse, the unfortunate novice expired without confession, of which he must have stood in so great need. We read in the *Life* of St. Camillus of Lellis that a young man, who was received into his Community in Naples, was persecuted by his father. At first he resisted with courage. He had to go to Rome on business, and there, in an interview with his father, he yielded to the temptation. On dismissing him the Saint predicted that he would come to an evil end and die by the hand of justice. This was verified. The young man married, and later, in a fit of jealousy, murdered his wife and two servants. He was apprehended and brought to justice, and although his father expended his whole fortune to save the life of his unhappy son, he was beheaded in the market place of Naples, nine years after his departure from the monastery.

Be, therefore, most watchful, my dear brother, should the devil seek by this means to make you lose your Vocation. The Lord, Who, by an especial grace, has called you to quit the world, desires you not only to leave, but also to forget your country and your friends.

Hearken, O daughter, and see and incline thine ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house (Ps. xliv. 11). Hearken then to what God says to you, and know that if you desert Him for the love of your relations, great will be your sorrow and remorse at the hour of death. You will then remember the House of God which you abandoned, and behold around your death-bed brothers and nephews in tears, who, at a time when you need spiritual help, will press you to leave them your goods, and not one will speak

to you of God; they will even try to delude you, not to increase your pain by the thought of death; they will hold out vain hopes of recovery, and thus you will die without preparation. Contrast with this the joy and peace you will feel on dying in Religion, where you will have the happiness of seeing around you your brethren, whose prayers will assist you to fix your hopes in Heaven, and who, instead of deceiving you, will aid you to expire in peace and joy. Reflect also, that though it be true that your parents have loved you for many years with some tenderness, God loved you long before, and with far greater love. Your parents have loved for twenty or thirty years or more, but God has loved you from all eternity. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* (Jer. xxxi. 3). Your parents have, it is true, been at some expense for your welfare and suffered on your account, but Jesus Christ shed all His Blood and gave His life for you. When, therefore, your tenderness for your parents urges you to be grateful to them and not to displease them, remember that much greater gratitude is due to God, Who has done more for you and loved you more than all others. Say, then, to yourself: "Relations, if I leave you, it is for God, Who merits my love more and loves me better than you." And by such words as these you will vanquish this terrible temptation of your kindred, which has caused the ruin of so many in this world and in the next.

Evening Meditation

THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS SHOWN US IN BECOMING MAN

I.

The Word was made flesh ... and delivered himself for us (Jo. i. 14. Eph. v. 2).

Let us consider the immense love which God shows us in becoming Man in order to procure us eternal life.

Our first parent, Adam, having sinned and rebelled against God, was driven out of Paradise and condemned to everlasting death with all his descendants. But behold the Son of God, Who, seeing man thus lost, in order to deliver him from death offers to take upon Himself human flesh, and to die condemned as a malefactor upon the Cross. But, my Son, we may suppose the Father saying to Him, consider what a life of humiliation

and suffering Thou wilt have to lead upon earth. Thou wilt have to be born in a cold cave, and to be laid in a manger for beasts. Thou wilt have to fly as an Infant into Egypt to escape from the hands of Herod. On Thy return from Egypt Thou wilt have to live in a shop as a humble servant, poor and despised. And, finally, worn out by sufferings, Thou wilt have to give up Thy life upon a Cross, insulted and forsaken by all. -- Father, all this matters not, replies the Son; I am content with enduring all, provided man is saved.

O great Son of God, Thou hast become Man in order to make Thyself loved by men; but where is the love that men bear to Thee? Thou hast given Thy Blood and Thy life to save our souls; why, then, are we so unthankful towards Thee, that, instead of loving Thee, we treat Thee with so much ingratitude and contempt? And behold, O Lord, I myself have been one of those who more than others have thus ill-treated Thee. But Thy Passion is my hope. Oh, for the sake of that love which induced Thee to assume human flesh and die for me on the Cross, forgive me all the offences I have committed against Thee.

I love Thee, O Incarnate Word, I love Thee, O my God!
II.

What would be said if a prince were to take compassion upon a dead worm, and were to choose to become a worm himself, and to make, as it were, a bath of his own blood, to die in order to restore the worm to life? But the Eternal Word has done even more than this for us; for, being God, He has chosen to become a worm like us, and to die for us, in order to purchase for us the life of divine grace which we had lost. When He saw that all the gifts He had bestowed upon us could not secure to Him our love, what did He do? He became Man, and He gave Himself entirely to us: *The Word was made flesh ... and delivered himself for us* (Jo. i. 14. Eph. v. 2).

Man, by despising God, says St. Fulgentius, separated himself from God; but God, through His love for man, came from Heaven to seek him. And why did He come? He came in order that man might know how much God loved him, and that thus, out of gratitude at least, he might love Him in return. Even the beasts, when they show us affection, make us love them; and

why, then, are we so ungrateful towards a God Who descends from Heaven to earth to make us love Him?

One day, when a priest was saying these words in Mass: *Et verbum caro factum est* -- *And the Word was made flesh* -- a man who was present neglected to make an act of reverence; upon which the devil gave him a blow, saying: "Ah, ungrateful man! if God had done as much for me as He has done for thee, I should remain continually prostrate with my face to the ground returning thanks to Him."

O Infinite Goodness, I love Thee, and I repent of all the injuries I have done Thee. Would that I could die of sorrow for them. O my Jesus, give me love. Let me not live any longer ungrateful for the affection Thou hast borne me. I am determined to love Thee always. Give me holy perseverance!

O Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, do thou obtain for me from thy Son the grace to love Him always -- even until death. Amen.

Tuesday--Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. XIII.

Consider that the life of a Religious resembles mostly the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus wished to live poor on this earth as the Son and Helpmate of a mechanic, in a poor dwelling, with poor clothing and poor food, that thereby He might give His servants to understand what ought to be the life of those who wish to be His followers. O my Lord, I will leave all and will follow Thee.

I.

The Apostle says that the Eternal Father predestines to the kingdom of Heaven those only who live conformably to the life of the Incarnate Word. *Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his son* (Rom. viii. 29). How happy, then, and secure of Paradise should not Religious be, seeing that God has called them to a state of life which, of all other states, is most like the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, on this earth, wished to live poor, the Son and Helpmate of a mechanic, in a poor dwelling, with poor clothing and

poor food: *Being rich he became poor for your sake, that through his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor. viii. 9). Moreover, He chose a most mortified life, far removed from the delights of the world, and ever full of pain and sorrow, beginning with His birth and ending with His death; hence by the Prophet He was called: *The man of sorrows* (Is. liii. 3). By this He wished to give His servants to understand what ought to be the life of those who wish to follow Him: *If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me* (Matt. xvi. 24). Following this example, and accepting this invitation of Jesus Christ, the Saints have endeavoured to despoil themselves of all earthly goods, and to take upon themselves pains and crosses, in order to be like their beloved Lord.

Thus we see that St. Benedict, who, being the son of the lord of Norcia, a relative of the Emperor Justinian, and born amidst the riches and pleasures of the world, while yet a youth of only fourteen, went to live in a cavern at Subiaco, where he received only a piece of bread brought him every day as an alms by the hermit Romanus.

Ah! my Master and my Redeemer, Jesus, I am, then, of the number of those fortunate ones whom Thou hast called to follow Thee. O my Lord! I thank Thee for this. I leave all; would that I had more to leave, that I might draw near to Thee, my King and my God, Who, for the love of me, and to give me courage by Thy example, didst choose for Thyself a life so poor and so painful. Walk on, O Lord, I will follow Thee. Choose Thou for me what cross Thou wilt, and help me. I will always carry it with constancy and love. I regret that in the past I have abandoned Thee, to follow my lusts and the vanities of the world; but now I am resolved to leave Thee no more. Bind me to Thy Cross, and if through weakness I sometimes resist, draw me by the sweet bonds of Thy love. Suffer it not that I ever leave Thee again.

II.

St. Francis of Assisi renounced in favour of his father the whole of his inheritance, and even his garments, and, thus poor and mortified, consecrated himself to Jesus Christ. Nor was it different with St. Francis Borgia and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, one being Duke of Gandia, the other of Castiglione. Both left all

their riches, their estates, their vassals, their country, their home, their parents, and went to live a poor life in Religion.

So have done many other noblemen and princes even of royal blood. Blessed Zedmerra, daughter of the King of Ethiopia, renounced the kingdom to become a Dominican nun. Blessed Johanna of Portugal renounced the kingdom of France and England to enter Religion. In the Benedictine Order alone there are found twenty-five emperors, and seventy-five kings and queens who left the world to live poor, mortified and forgotten by the world, in a poor cloister. Ah! indeed, these and not the grandees of the world are the truly fortunate ones.

At present worldlings think these to be fools, but in the Valley of Josaphat they shall know that they themselves have been the fools; and when they see the Saints on their thrones crowned by God they shall say, lamenting and in despair: *These are they whom we had sometime in derision ... we fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!* (Wis. v. 3, 4, 5).

Yes, my Jesus, I renounce all the satisfactions of the world; the only satisfaction I seek is to love Thee, and to suffer as Thou pleasest. I hope thus to come one day to be united to Thee in Thy kingdom by the bond of eternal love, there to see Thee and to love Thee without fear of ever being separated from Thee. I love Thee, O my God, my All, and will always love Thee. Thou art my hope, O Most Holy Mary, thou, the most conformed to Jesus, art now the most powerful to obtain this grace. Be thou my protectress!

Spiritual Reading

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES

II. ANXIETY CONCERNING HEALTH

Another temptation with which the devil is wont to attack a novice, is too much anxiety about his health. The deceiver thus insinuates himself into the mind of the novice: "Do you not perceive that by leading such a life you will ruin your health, and then you will be no use either to the world or to God." The novice must repel this temptation by confidence in Our Lord, for He Who has given him a Vocation will also give him health to

follow it. If he has entered into the House of God solely to please Him, as we suppose he has, let him console himself by saying: "I concealed nothing concerning the state of my health from my Superiors, and they received me and have not yet dismissed me; it is then the will of God that I should remain here, and if it be His will that I should suffer and even die in His House what does it signify? How many anchorets have gone to suffer for Him in forests and caverns! How many Martyrs have run with joy to give their lives for Him! If, then, it be His will that I should lose my health or my life for His love, I am content; I desire nothing else, I can desire nothing better." Thus will the fervent Religious speak who desires to become a Saint. If a novice is not fervent during his novitiate, it is certain that he will never be so in after life.

III. THE INCONVENIENCES OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

A third temptation is the fear of not being able to undergo the inconveniences of the common life, such as scanty and ill-prepared food, a hard bed, little sleep, prohibition to go out of the house, the observance of silence, and, above all, not being allowed to follow one's own will. When the novice is assailed by this temptation, he should repeat what St. Bernard used to say to himself: "Bernard, why art thou come hither?"

He must remember that he has not come to the House of God to make himself comfortable, but to become a Saint; and how can he become a Saint? Is it by comfort and pleasure? No; but by sufferings, and by dying to his own disorderly affections and appetites. St. Teresa says, that "to expect that God will admit to His love those who are fond of their own ease, is a great mistake." And in another place: "Souls who truly love God cannot ask for repose." He, therefore, who is not firmly resolved to suffer and to bear everything for the love of God, will never become a Saint. No; he will never become a Saint, nor even enjoy true peace. And why? Do you, perhaps, imagine that true peace is to be found in the enjoyment of worldly goods or sensual pleasures, or perhaps you fancy that the highborn rich, who abound in these things, have arrived at it? They are most miserable, they are nourished upon gall. *All is vanity and affliction of spirit* (Eccles. i. 14). It was thus that Solomon described earthly goods,

which he had fully enjoyed. When a man places his affections upon these things, the more he has the more he desires, and he is never at rest; but when he places all his happiness in God, in Him he finds perfect peace. *Delight in the Lord*, says David, *and he will give thee the requests of thy heart* (Ps. xxxiv. 4). Father Charles of Lorraine, brother to the Duke of Lorraine, became a Religious, and when alone in his poor cell he felt so great an interior peace that he danced for joy. Blessed Seraphim, a Capuchin, said that he would not give a foot length of his cord for all the wealth and dignities of the earth; and St. Teresa would often encourage others under difficulties by saying: "When a soul is resolved to suffer, the suffering ceases."

IV. DISCOURAGEMENT IN ARIDITIES

But here we must take notice of an error by which the devil tempts a novice when he feels this affliction of spirit. "Do you not see," he says to him, "that you have not found peace here? You have lost devotion, everything is wearisome -- prayer, spiritual reading, Communion, even recreation. These are signs that God does not wish you to remain in Religion." Oh, what a terrible and dangerous temptation this is for a new and inexperienced novice! In order to overcome it he must first consider the true nature of peace of soul whilst on earth, which is a place of trial, and therefore must be one of pain. This peace does not consist, as we have already seen, in the enjoyment of the good things of this world. It does not consist even in spiritual delights, for these do not increase our merit, or make us more dear to God. True peace is to be found only in conformity of our will to the will of God, and the peace we ought to desire is that of having our will perfectly united to the Divine will, even in our darkness and desolation. O, how dear to God is the soul that faithfully perseveres in Spiritual Reading, Meditation, Communions, and other pious exercises solely to please Him, without feeling any sensible consolation! O, the great merit of good works when performed purely for God's sake, without looking for reward here below! The Venerable Father Anthony Torres wrote to a person in spiritual desolation: "When we carry the Cross of Jesus without consolation, our soul runs, nay, flies towards perfection." When a novice is in a state of aridity he should say to God: "O Lord, if it

is Thy will that I should remain in desolation and deprived of all comfort, I desire to be in that state as long as it pleases Thee; I will never leave Thee; behold me ready to endure these troubles during my whole life, and even for all eternity, if Thou wilt it. For me it is enough to know that it is Thy will." It is thus a novice who really desires to love God will speak; but let him be certain that such sufferings will not last for ever. By such insinuations the devil seeks to destroy his confidence, causing him to believe that his desolation will last for ever, that it will bring him to despair, and that at length he will be unable to endure it. These terrible storms, however, which the enemy is able to raise in the soul when it is in darkness and desolation, will not endure for ever. *To him that overcometh I will give a hidden manna*, says Our Lord. (Apoc. ii. 17). Yes, those who pass through such tempests of aridity and desolation with patience, and overcome such temptations, shall be consoled by the Lord Himself, Who will give them to taste a hidden manna -- that interior peace which, according to St. Paul, *surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7). This one thought -- I am doing the will of God, I am pleasing God -- gives a peace far superior to all the joys, pastimes, feastings, honours and dignities of the world. God cannot fail in the promise He has made to those who have left all things for His love. *And every one that hath left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold here, and shall possess life everlasting* (Matt. xix. 29). He promises them Paradise in the next world and an hundred-fold in this. And what is this hundred-fold? It is the testimony of a good conscience, which immeasurably surpasses all the pleasures of this life.

Evening Meditation

JESUS HAS DONE AND SUFFERED EVERYTHING TO SAVE US.

I.

He hath loved me and delivered himself for me (Gal. ii. 20).

The Son of God being true God is infinitely happy; and yet, as St. Thomas says, He has done and suffered as much for man as if He could not be happy without him. If Jesus Christ had been obliged to earn for Himself upon this earth His Eternal Be-

attitude, what could He have done more than to burden Himself with all our weaknesses, and assume all our infirmities, and then end His life with a death so severe and ignominious? But no, He was innocent, He was holy, and was in Himself blessed; whatever He did and suffered was all to gain for us divine grace and Paradise, which we had lost.

Miserable is he who does not love Thee, my Jesus, and does not pass his life enamoured of so much goodness.

If, therefore, my Jesus, Thou hast for love of me embraced a laborious life and bitter death, I may, indeed say that Thy death is mine, Thy sufferings are mine, Thy merits are mine, Thou Thyself art mine; since for me Thou hast given Thyself up to so great sufferings. Ah, my Jesus, there is nothing that afflicts me more than the thought that once Thou wert mine, and that I have so often willingly lost Thee. Forgive me, and unite me to Thyself; suffer me not in future ever to offend Thee again. I love Thee with all my heart. Thou wilt be all mine; and I will be entirely Thine.

II.

If Jesus Christ had permitted us to ask Him for the greatest proof of His love, who would have dared to propose to Him to become a Child like one of us, to embrace all our miseries, to make Himself of all men the most poor, the most despised, the most ill-used, even to dying in torments the infamous death of the Cross, cursed and forsaken by all, even by His own Father? But that which we should not have dared even to think of, He has both thought of and done.

My beloved Redeemer, I beseech Thee to bestow upon me the graces which Thou hast merited for me by Thy death. I love Thee, and am sorry for having offended Thee. Oh, take my soul into Thy hands; I will not let the devil have dominion over it any more; I desire that it may be entirely Thine, since Thou hast bought it with Thy Blood. Thou alone lovest me, and Thee alone will I love. Deliver me from the misery of living without Thy love, and then chastise me as Thou wilt. O Mary, my refuge, the death of Jesus and thy intercession are my hope.

Wednesday--Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. XIV.

Consider the zeal that Religious ought to have for the salvation of souls.

Our Redeemer did not impose on St. Peter penance, prayers, or other things, but only that he should endeavour to save His sheep. *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? ... Feed my sheep* (Jo. xxi. 17).

Yes, O my Lord, I will serve Thee with all my strength in this great work.

I.

He who is called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer will never be a true follower of Jesus Christ, and will never become a Saint, if he does not fulfil the end of his Vocation, and has not the spirit of the Institute, which is the salvation of souls, especially souls that are the most destitute of spiritual succour, such as the poor people in the country.*

*Although St. Alphonsus in this Consideration had especially in view the Congregation of Missionaries which he founded, yet what he says here is for all Religious of both sexes, and indeed for all who serve God. --EDITOR

This was truly the end for which our Redeemer came down from Heaven: *The spirit of the Lord*, our Divine Master says, *hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor* (Luke iv. 18). He sought no other proof of Peter's love for Him but that he should procure the salvation of souls: *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? ... Feed my sheep* (Jo. xxi. 17). He did not impose upon him, says St. John Chrysostom, penance, prayers, or anything else, He only asked that he would endeavour to save His sheep: "Christ did not say to him, give your money away, fast, weaken your body with hard work, but He said: *Feed My sheep*." And He declares that He would look upon every benefit conferred on the least of our neighbours as conferred on Himself. *Amen, I say to you, as often you have done it unto one of these my least brethren, you have done it unto me* (Matt. xxv. 40).

Every Religious ought, therefore, with the utmost care, to

nourish this zeal, and this spirit of helping souls. To this end must his studies be directed; and his constant thought and his whole attention bestowed on work for souls assigned to him by his superiors. He would be wanting in this spirit, who, through the desire of attending only to himself and of leading a retired and solitary life, would not accept wholeheartedly the work imposed on him by obedience.

O my Lord Jesus Christ, how can I thank Thee enough, in that Thou hast called me to the same work Thou didst Thyself perform on earth; namely, to help in the salvation of souls by my poor labours? In what have I deserved this honour and this reward, after having offended Thee so grievously myself, and having caused others also to offend Thee? Yes, O my Lord! Thou callest me to help Thee in this great undertaking. I will serve Thee with all my strength.

II.

What greater glory can a man have than to be, as St. Paul says, a co-operator with God in this great work of the salvation of souls? He who loves the Lord ardently is not content to be alone in loving Him, he would draw all to His love, saying with David: *O magnify the Lord with me, and let us extol his name together* (Ps. xxxiii. 4). Hence St. Augustine exhorts all those who love God to "draw all men to His love."

A good ground of hope for his own salvation has he who, with true zeal, labours for the salvation of souls. "Have you saved a soul?" says St. Augustine, "then you have predestinated your own." The Holy Ghost promises: *When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry, and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul ... the Lord will fill thy soul with brightness ... and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail* (Is. lviii. 10, 11). In this -- namely, in procuring the salvation of others -- St. Paul placed his hope of eternal salvation, when he said to his disciples of Thessalonica: *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Are not you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* (1 Thess. ii. 19).

Behold, O Jesus, I offer Thee all my labours and my blood, and even my life in order to obey Thee. Nor do I in this seek to gratify my own inclination, or to gain the applause and esteem

of men; I desire nothing but to see Thee loved by all as Thou deservest. I prize my happy lot, and call myself fortunate, that Thou hast chosen me for this great work, in which, I now protest that I renounce all the praise of men and all self-satisfaction, and seek only Thy glory. To Thee be all the honour and satisfaction, and to me only the discomfort, the blame, and the reproach. Accept, O Lord, this offering which I, a miserable sinner, who wish to love Thee and to see Thee loved by others, make of myself to Thee, and give me strength to do what I desire.

Most Holy Mary, my advocate, who lovest souls so much, help me.

Spiritual Reading

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES

V. DOUBTS ABOUT THE VOCATION ITSELF

But I have not yet done. There remains a still more dangerous temptation. Those which I have hitherto described are worldly and carnal, and it is more easy therefore to recognise them as coming from the devil, and overcome them. It is different with temptations which conceal themselves under the appearance of devotion and a greater good; these are more terrible, and more easily mislead.

The first of these temptations, ordinarily, is to throw doubt on the Vocation itself. "Who can say," the devil suggests, "whether yours is a true Vocation, or only fancy? If you have not been really called by God, you will not receive the grace of perseverance, and after you have made the vows you will repent and apostatize; you might have saved your soul in the world, and here it may be lost." In order to overcome this temptation you must consider how one can know that his Vocation is certain. A Vocation is certain when three things concur -- first, a good intention; that is to say, the desire of escaping from the dangers of the world, of better ensuring eternal salvation, or of becoming more closely united to God; secondly, when there is no positive impediment in regard to health or talent, or necessity of parents, and upon all these the novice should be perfectly at rest after he has submitted them to the judgment of his superiors sincerely and truthfully; thirdly, when he is accepted by the superiors. Now, where there is a concurrence of these three things, the

novice should not doubt that he has a true Vocation.

VI. THE THOUGHT THAT ONE COULD LIVE MORE DEVOUTLY IF ONE WERE FREE

Another temptation which the evil spirit employs with those who, before entering Religion, led a spiritual life, is: "When you were in the world," he says, "you prayed more than now, you practised more mortifications, you observed silence better, were more recollected, and gave more alms and so forth. You are not able to do all these good things now, and still less will you be when you have finished your novitiate, for your superiors will then put you to study or employ you in some office in the Community, or in other things of obedience which will divert you from these pious works." O what an illusion! If a novice heeds such a temptation it is a sign that he does not understand the great merit of obedience. He who offers all his prayers to God (and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says that everything which is done in a religious community is prayer), his alms, his fasts and penances, gives to Him a part of what belongs to him, but not all; or, to speak more correctly, he gives what he possesses, but he does not give himself; whereas he who renounces his own will by a vow of obedience, gives himself entirely to God, and may say: "Lord, having consecrated my whole will to Thee, I have nothing more to give." His own will is the thing of which it is the most difficult for a man to divest himself, but it is the gift which is most acceptable to God, and which He requires of us. *My son give me thy heart* (Prov. xiii. 26), that is, thy will; and therefore Our Lord declares that obedience is more pleasing to Him than all other sacrifices. *Obedience is better than sacrifices* (1 Kings, xv. 22). Thus he who gives himself to God by obedience obtains, not once only, but for ever, a victory over the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, and whatever else may stand in the way of his perfection. *An obedient man shall speak of victory* (Prov. xxi. 28). A man who lives in the world, no doubt, gains merit by his fasts, disciplines, prayers, and such like, but following in these his own will, he gains less than a Religious, who does all through obedience. The Religious gains more merit, and gains continually, because everything in the Community is done under obedience. Here he merits not only when he prays, or fasts, or takes the dis-

cipline, but also when he studies, or takes the fresh air, or sits at table, or makes recreation, or takes repose. St. Aloysius Gonzaga used to say, that in the vessel of religion we always advance, even when we do not ply the oar. Hence we understand how persons who have led a spiritual life in the world have sought to submit themselves to obedience by entering some Religious Order, well knowing the greater merit of good works that are performed through obedience.

Evening Meditation

JESUS COMES TO LEAD AN AFFLICTED LIFE

I.

Having joy set before him he endured the cross (Heb. xii. 2).

In creating man in the beginning, God did not place him on earth to suffer, but put him into *the paradise of pleasure* (Gen. ii. 15). He put man in a place of delight in order that he might pass thence to Heaven where he would enjoy for all eternity the glory of the blessed. But by sin man unhappily made himself unworthy of his earthly Paradise, and closed against himself the gates of the Heavenly Paradise, wilfully condemning himself to death and to everlasting misery. But what did the Son of God do to rescue man from such a state of misery? From being blessed and most happy as He was He chose to be afflicted and tormented. 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 a life full of joys, and receiving the honour due to Him as King and Lord of all. One drop of His Blood, a single tear of His offered to God would have redeemed the world, and a countless number of worlds, on account of the Infinite dignity of His Person. But no! -- having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross. He renounced all pleasures and honours and made choice on earth of a life full of toil and ignominy. "What was sufficient for Redemption," says St. John Chrysostom, "was not sufficient for love."

Yes, because this Man was born on purpose to suffer, therefore He took to Himself a body particularly adapted for suffering. As the Apostle tells us, He said to His Eternal Father as He came into this world: *Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me* (Heb. x. 5). Thou hast given Me a body

as I requested of Thee, delicate, sensitive, and made for suffering. I gladly accept this body and offer it to Thee; because by suffering in this body all the pains which will accompany Me through life and finally cause My death upon the Cross, I shall propitiate Thee on behalf of the human race, and gain for Myself the love of men.

Glory be to God in the highest (Luke ii. 14). I thank Thee, O Jesus, in the name of all mankind, but I thank Thee especially for myself, a miserable sinner. What would have become of me, what hope could I have had of pardon and salvation, if Thou, my Saviour, hadst not come down from Heaven to save me? Therefore do I praise Thee, and thank Thee, and love Thee.

II.

Behold, then, Jesus has scarcely entered into this world when He begins His sacrifice by beginning to suffer. While an Infant in His Mother's womb, Jesus endures for nine months the darkness of that prison; He endures all the pain and is fully alive to all He endures. Jesus was in wisdom, not in age, a Man, while yet unborn, says St. Bernard. He comes forth from His Mother's womb; but He comes forth to fresh suffering. He chooses to be born in the depth of the winter in a cavern, where beasts find stabling, and at the hour of midnight! He is born in such poverty that He has no fire to warm Him, or clothes to screen Him from the winter's cold. "A noble pulpit is that manger!" says St. Thomas of Villanova. Oh, how well does Jesus teach us the love of suffering in the grotto of Bethlehem!

If thou wishest to love Jesus Christ, learn from Him how thou must love Him. "Learn from Christ how thou must love Christ," says St. Bernard. Rejoice to suffer something for the God Who suffered so much for thee. The desire of pleasing Jesus Christ, and of showing Him the love they bore Him was what rendered the Saints hungry and thirsty, not for honours and pleasures, but for sufferings and contempt. This made the Apostle say: *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. vi. 14). And St. Teresa: "Either to suffer or to die!" And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi: "To suffer and not to die!" And St. John of the Cross: "O Lord, that I may suffer and be despised for Thy sake!"

O my dear Redeemer, I praise Thine infinite Mercy! I praise Thine infinite Charity! I love Thee above all things, I love Thee more than myself. I love Thee with my whole soul and I give myself all to Thee. Receive, O Sacred Infant, these acts of love. If they are cold because they come from a frozen heart, do Thou inflame this poor heart of mine, a heart that has offended Thee, but is now penitent. O most holy Mary, obtain for me the grace to live always bound to thy Son by the blessed chains of love. Pray to Him for me. This is my hope.

Thursday--Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE. XV.

Consider how necessary are the virtues of meekness and humility for Religious.

Our Most Holy Redeemer willed to be called a Lamb that He might show us how meek and humble He Himself was, and that His disciples might learn from Him to be likewise *meek and humble of heart* (Matt. xi. 29). The Holy Ghost says: *That which is agreeable to him is faith and meekness* (Ecclus. i. 34, 35).

I.

Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart. Meekness and humility of heart are virtues that Jesus, the Lamb of God, principally requires of Religious who profess to imitate His most holy life. He who lives as a solitary in a desert has not so much need of these virtues; but for him who lives in a Community, it is impossible not to meet, now and then, with a reprimand from his superiors, or something disagreeable from his companions. In such cases, a Religious who loves not meekness will commit a thousand faults every day, and live an unquiet life. He must be all sweetness with everybody -- with strangers, with companions, and also with inferiors if he should ever become Superior; and if he be an inferior, he must consider that one act of meekness in bearing contempt and reproach is of greater value to him than a thousand fasts and a thousand *disciplines*.

St. Francis said that many make their perfection consist in exterior mortifications, and, after all, are not able to bear one injurious word. "Not understanding," he added, "how much

greater gain is made by patiently bearing injuries." How many persons, as St. Bernard remarks, are all sweetness when nothing is said or done contrary to their inclination, but show their want of meekness when anything crosses them! And if one should ever be a Superior, let him believe that a single reprimand made with meekness will profit his subjects more than a thousand made with severity. "The meek are useful to themselves and to others," as St. John Chrysostom teaches. In short, as the same Saint said, the greatest sign of a virtuous soul is to see it preserve itself in meekness on occasions of contradiction. A meek heart is the delight of the Heart of God. *That which is agreeable to him is faith and meekness.*

O most humble Jesus, Who, for love of me didst humble Thyself, and become obedient unto the death of the Cross, how have I the courage to appear before Thee, and call myself Thy follower? I who see myself to be such a sinner and so proud that I cannot bear a single injury without resenting it. Whence comes such pride in me, who for my sins have so many times deserved to be cast forever into hell with the devils? Ah, my despised Jesus, help me and make me conformable to Thee. I will change my life.

II.

It would be well for a Religious to represent to himself in his meditations, all the contradictions that may happen to him, and arm himself against them; and then when the occasion presents itself, he ought to do violence to himself, that he may not be excited or break out in impatience. Therefore, he should refrain from speaking when his mind is disturbed, till he is certain that he has become calm again.

But to bear injuries quietly, it is above all necessary to have a great fund of humility. He who is truly humble is not only unmoved when he sees himself despised, but is even pleased, and rejoices at it in his spirit, however much the flesh may resent it; for he sees himself treated as he deserves, and made conformable to Jesus Christ, Who, worthy as He was of every honour, chose, for the love of us, to be satiated with contempt and injuries.

Brother Juniper, a disciple of St. Francis, when an injury was done to him, held up his cowl, as if expecting to receive

pearls from Heaven. The Saints have ever been more desirous of injuries than worldlings are covetous of applause and honours. And of what use is a Religious who does not know how to bear contempt for God's sake? He is always proud; humble only in name, and a hypocrite whom divine grace will repulse, as the Holy Ghost says: *God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace* (1 Peter v. 5).

O Jesus, for love of me Thou hast borne so much contempt; I, for love of Thee, will bear every injury. Thou, O my Redeemer, hast made contempt honourable, indeed, and desirable, since Thou hast embraced it with so much love during Thy own life. *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. vi. 14). O my most humble Mistress, Mary, Mother of God, thou who wast in all, and especially in suffering, the most conformed to thy, Son, obtain for me the grace to bear in peace all the injuries which henceforward may be offered to me. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES

VII. THE THOUGHT THAT ONE COULD BE MORE USEFUL TO ONE'S NEIGHBOURS IN THE WORLD THAN IN RELIGION

There is a temptation yet more dangerous, namely, the devil represents to a novice that he can be of more use in the world than in Religion. "You are come," he says, "into this Community, where there are so many others striving to assist souls, but you could do far more good by remaining in your own country, which has such need of Apostolic labourers to help souls." A man who feels this temptation must remember that the greatest good which we can possibly do is that which God wishes of us. He has no need of any one, and if He sees fit to send more help to your countrymen, He can do it by others. As He has called you into His House, it is there that you will find the good which He has appointed for you to do and it is this: to be perfectly obedient to your Rule and to the commands of your Superiors. If through obedience you should remain inactive in any one place, or be employed in sweeping the house or washing the dishes -- these are the best works for you.

And what good can a man do in his own country? Jesus

Christ Himself when asked to preach and do good in His own country, replied: *No prophet is accepted in his own country* (Luke iv. 24). This is so true that people have, indeed, a great repugnance to confess great faults to a priest who is their own relative and fellow-countryman, and is constantly amongst them, and they frequently prefer to go to strangers. As regards sermons, it is often said that those of a fellow-countryman are little valued by his hearers, because he is one of themselves, and they are accustomed to his voice. If a preacher were a St. Paul he would be listened to, at first, with great effect, but when he had been heard for six months or a year he would please less and be of less profit to his hearers. Missionaries for this reason do much good in the places they visit, because they are strangers, and their voice is new to the people. It is certain that a priest belonging to a Community, and, above all, a missionary, will save more souls in a single month and in a single mission, than if he had remained ten years labouring in his native place. Besides, by remaining in the same place, he can only assist those immediately around, whereas if he is engaged in missions he will save souls in a hundred, in a thousand different places. Again, a secular is sometimes doubtful and uncertain as to which, among different good works, is most pleasing to God; a Religious in obeying his superior, is certain of the will of God. Religious are those servants who may say with confidence: *We are happy O Israel; because the things that are pleasing to God are made known to us* (Baruch. iv. 4).

In fine, the devil tempts those whom God has, perhaps, favoured with spiritual consolations, such as the gift of tears, and sensible emotions of love, saying: "Do you not perceive that you are not called to an active life in Religion, but are intended for the contemplative, for solitude, and for union of the soul with God? You should choose some other Order or a hermitage." If the devil were to tempt me in this manner, I should answer: "As you have mentioned Vocation, I ought to follow my Vocation rather than my inclination, or your suggestions; and, as God, in the first instance, has called me to an active Order, who will assure me that the thought of leaving it is an inspiration, and not a temptation?"

I would say just the same to you, my brother. God no doubt calls some to the active, and others to the contemplative life. But, as He has called you to an active Order, you should believe that any other thought comes from the devil, who thus tries to make you lose your true Vocation. St. Philip Neri says: "that we ought not to leave a good state for a better, unless we are certain that it is the will of God; and, therefore, if you would avoid error, you should be more than morally certain that God desires you to change." But what certainty can you have, especially if your superior and your spiritual Father tell you that it is a temptation? Consider, moreover, St. Thomas teaches that though the contemplative life is in itself more perfect than the active, yet the mixed life -- that is, one divided between prayer and action -- is the most perfect of all; for such was the life of Jesus Christ Himself. And such is the life in all well-ordered active Communities, in which many hours are each day devoted to prayer and silence; and we may say that the Religious lead an active life when abroad, but are like so many hermits at home.

Therefore, my dear brother, suffer not the enemy to lead you away by specious pretexts, and be assured that if you leave the Congregation which has accepted you, you, like so many others, will repent when it will be too late to apply a remedy; for he who has once abandoned the Religious life will find it very difficult to be received again.

Evening Meditation

THE SORROW THAT THE INGRATITUDE OF MEN HAS CAUSED JESUS

I.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not (St. John i. 11).

During the holy time of Christmas St. Francis of Assisi went about the highways and woods, weeping and sighing with inconsolable lamentations. When asked the reason he answered: "How can I help weeping when I see that Love is not loved? I see a God become as it were foolish for the love of man, and man so ungrateful to this God!" Now, if this ingratitude of men so afflicted the heart of St. Francis, let us consider how much more it must have afflicted the Heart of Jesus Christ Himself. Scarcely

was He conceived in the womb of Mary than He saw the cruel ingratitude He was to receive from men. He had descended from Heaven to enkindle the fire of Divine love, and this desire alone had brought Him down to this earth, to suffer here the greatest sorrows and ignominies: *I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?* (Luke xii. 49). And then He beheld the awful sins which men would commit after having seen so many proofs of His love. It was this, says St. Bernardine of Sienna, which made Him feel an infinite grief.

It is true, then, O my Jesus, that Thou didst descend from Heaven to make me love Thee; didst come down to embrace a life of suffering and the death of the Cross for my sake, in order that I might welcome Thee into my heart; and yet I have so often driven Thee from me and said: "Depart from me, Lord; go away from me, Lord; for I do not want Thee." O God, if Thou wert not infinite Goodness, and hadst not given Thy life to obtain my pardon, I should not have the courage to ask it of Thee. But I feel that Thou Thyself dost offer me peace: *Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn to you* (Zach. i. 3). Thou, Thyself, Whom I have offended, O my Jesus, makest Thyself my Intercessor: *He is the propitiation for our sins* (1 Jo. ii. 2). I will therefore not do Thee this fresh injury of distrusting Thy mercy. I repent with all my soul of having despised Thee, O sovereign Good; receive me into Thy favour, for the sake of the Blood which Thou hast shed for me: *Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy son* (Luke xv. 21).

II.

Even amongst us it is an insufferable sorrow for one man to see himself treated with ingratitude by another; for, as the Blessed Simon of Cassia observes, ingratitude often afflicts the soul more than any pain afflicts the body: "Ingratitude often causes more bitter sorrow in the soul than pain causes in the body." What sorrow, then, must our ingratitude have caused Jesus, Who was our God, when He saw that His benefits and His love would be repaid by offences and injuries? *And they repaid me evil for good, and hatred for my love* (Ps. cviii. 5). But even at the present day it seems as if Jesus Christ is going about complaining: *I am become a stranger to my brethren* (Ps. lxxviii. 9). For He sees that many neither

love nor know Him, as if He had not done them any good, nor had suffered anything for love of them. O God, what value do so many Christians even now set upon the love of Jesus Christ? Our Blessed Redeemer once appeared to Blessed Henry Suso in the form of a pilgrim who went begging from door to door for a lodging, but every one drove Him away with insults and injuries. How many, alas! are like those of whom Job speaks: *Who said to God: Depart from us ... whereas he had filled their houses with good things* (Job xxii. 17). We have hitherto joined these ungrateful wretches; but shall we continue always like them? No; for that amiable Infant does not deserve it, Who came from Heaven to suffer and die for us in order that we might love Him.

No, my Redeemer and my Father, I am no longer worthy to be Thy son, having so often renounced Thy love; but Thou, by Thy merits, dost make me worthy. I thank Thee, O my Father. I thank Thee, and I love Thee. Ah, the thought alone of the patience with which Thou hast borne with me for so many years, and of the favours Thou hast conferred upon me after the many injuries that I have done Thee, ought to make me live constantly on fire with Thy love. Come, then, my Jesus, for I will not drive Thee away any more, come and dwell in my poor heart. I love Thee and will always love Thee; but do Thou inflame my heart more and more by the remembrance of the love Thou hast borne me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, help me, pray to Jesus for me; make me live during the remainder of my life, grateful to that God Who has loved me so much, even though I have so greatly offended Him.

Friday--Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation

JESUS WISHES TO BE LOVED.

A child is born to us and a son is given to us (Is. ix. 6).

Behold the end for which the Son of God willed to be born an Infant -- to give Himself to us from His Childhood, and thus draw to Himself our love. Thus He wished to be born because He wished to be loved.

I.

God conferred so many blessings on men in order to draw

them to love Him; but these ungrateful men not only did not love Him, but they would not even acknowledge Him as their Lord. Only in one corner of the earth, in Judea, was He recognized as God by His chosen people; and by them He was more feared than loved. He, however, Who wished to be more loved than feared by us, became Man like unto us, chose a poor, suffering obscure life, and a painful and ignominious death. And why? To draw our hearts to Himself. If Jesus Christ had not redeemed us, He would have been no less great or less happy; but He determined to procure our salvation at the cost of so many labours and sufferings, as if His happiness depended on ours. He might have redeemed us without suffering; but no -- He willed to free us from eternal death by His own death; and though He was able to save us in a thousand ways, He chose the most humiliating and painful way of dying through pure suffering on the Cross, to purchase the love of us, ungrateful worms of the earth. And what, indeed, was the cause of His miserable Birth and His most sorrowful death, if not the love He had for us?

Ah, my Jesus, may Thy love for me destroy in me all earthly affections, and consume me in the fire which Thou didst come to kindle on the earth. I curse a thousand times those shameful passions which cost Thee so much pain. I repent, my dear Redeemer, with all my heart, of all the offences I have committed against Thee. For the future I will rather die than offend Thee; and I wish to do all that I can to please Thee. I love Thee, my only Good, my Love, my All.

II.

Drop down dew, O ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just (Is. xlv. 8). Send forth the Lamb, the Ruler of the earth (Is. xvi. 1).

Thus did the holy Prophets desire for so many years the coming of the Saviour. The same Prophet Isaias said: *Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down: the mountains would melt away at thy presence ... the waters would burn with fire (Is. lxiv. 1, 2).* Lord, he said, when men shall see that Thou didst come on earth out of love for them, the mountains shall be made smooth, that is, men in serving Thee will conquer all the difficulties that at first appeared to them insuperable obstacles.

The waters shall burn with fire, and the coldest hearts will feel themselves burning with Thy love, at the sight of Thee made Man; and how well has this been verified in many happy souls! -- in St. Teresa, in St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, who even in this life were consumed by this holy fire. But how many such are there? Alas! but too few.

Ah, my Jesus, amongst these few I wish also to be. How many years ought I not already to be burning in hell, separated from Thee, hating and cursing Thee forever! But no, Thou hast borne with me with so much patience, that Thou mightest see me burn, not with that unhappy flame, but with the blessed fire of Thy love; for this end Thou hast given me so many illuminations, and hast so often wounded my heart while I was far from Thee; finally, Thou hast done so much that Thou hast forced me to love Thee by Thy sweet attractions. Behold, I am now Thine. I will be Thine always and altogether. It remains for Thee to make me faithful, and this I confidently hope from Thy goodness. O my God! who could ever have the heart to leave Thee again and to live even a moment without Thy love? I love Thee with all my heart, but this is too little. My Jesus, hear me, give me more love, more love, more love. O Mary, pray to God for me.

Spiritual Reading

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES

VIII. ON THE MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE

1. The first means for persevering in the Religious State is to *avoid wilful faults*. Let each one be persuaded that the devil tempts him to commit faults, not so much that he may do evil, as that he may lose his Vocation, for by deliberate faults he begins to lose his fervour in prayer, at Communion, and all the spiritual exercises. The Lord then justly withholds His especial graces, according to that of St. Paul: *He who sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly* (2 Cor. ix. 6). And this the more certainly if his defect be pride, for God resists the proud, and over these the devil acquires great power. So that whilst on the one hand, the tepidity of the novice increases, on the other, the Divine light diminishes; and thus it will not be difficult for the enemy to succeed in making him give

up his Vocation.

2. Another means is to *blow up the mine*; that is, to *reveal the temptation to the Superior*. St. Philip Neri said, "that a temptation made known, is a temptation half conquered." As an abscess, if unopened, becomes gangrened, so a temptation concealed brings on our own ruin. Experience shows that those who hide such temptations in their own bosoms, allow themselves to be brought into a position where they know not whether they should take the right or the left (that is, to doubt which way they ought to take, the right or the left), and generally lose their Vocation. It is necessary, therefore, to make one great effort, and discover all to the Superior. God will be so pleased by this act of humility, and by the violence the novice does to his feelings, that He will instantly enlighten his darkness and dissipate his doubts.

3. The third means is *Prayer*, that is, *recourse to God, that He may give you the grace of Perseverance*, a grace which, according to St. Augustine, can only be obtained by prayer. But let that novice who has received from God the gift of Vocation, and is tempted to abandon it, take care when he prays to Our Lord, not to say: "Lord, show me what I ought to do; enlighten me" -- because God has already given him light by calling him to His holy House, and if he only asks for this grace, the devil, who can easily change himself into an angel of light, may deceive him and make him believe that the thought of leaving Religion is an effect of divine light. His prayer should rather be: "O Lord, Thou hast given me a Vocation, give me also strength to persevere in it." A certain young man was called by God to the Religious state, and his Vocation being approved by his director, after many trials he joined a Religious Community. His parents did all in their power against him, and succeeded in prevailing upon him to go to another place, that he might more thoroughly examine his Vocation; unfortunately, instead of returning to the Community, he went home, satisfying his parents by this step, but displeasing God. When I asked him how it happened that he committed such an error, he replied, that he had prayed to God in these words: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth* (1 Kings iii. 9). And afterwards he adopted the resolution of returning to his family. I said to him: "O my son, you were mistaken in your prayer. Your

Vocation was certain, being confirmed by so many evident signs; you should not have said: *Loquere, Domine*, for God had already spoken, but: *Confirma hoc, Deus, quad operatus es in me* (Ps. lxxvii. 26). (Give me, O Lord, strength to execute Thy will, which Thou hast made known to me). You omitted to do this, and, therefore, you lost your Vocation." Let the misfortune of this young man serve as an admonition to others. Again, let not the novice endeavour to tranquillise his mind by the light of his own reason in such times of temptation, for they are indeed seasons of darkness and confusion; let him simply offer himself anew to God, saying: "O my God, I give myself to Thee, I will never leave Thee, help me lest I become unfaithful to Thee." By repeating these words whenever the temptation returns, and, as I have already said, by making his state known to his Superior, he will certainly be victorious. He should recommend himself particularly at such times, to Mary, the Mother of Perseverance.

A novice once suffered himself to yield to a temptation of this kind, and was on the point of quitting the monastery, but, passing before an image of the Mother of God, he stopped and knelt down to repeat an Ave Maria, when he suddenly found himself fixed to the spot and unable to rise; upon which he repented, and made a vow of perseverance. He was immediately freed, and rising, went to ask pardon of the Master of novices, and continued firm in his Vocation.

Finally, I entreat you, my brother, whenever you are tempted concerning your Vocation, to reflect on these two points. First, that the grace of Vocation which God has given you, He has not given to many of your companions, some, perhaps, more deserving than you: *He hath not done in like manner to every nation* (Ps. clvii. 19). Therefore you should fear to be so ungrateful as to turn your back upon Him, for by so doing you would greatly endanger your eternal salvation. And rest assured that you will not have peace, but will be tormented, even to your dying day, with remorse because of your infidelity.

Secondly, if the temptation should present itself to your mind, that if you remain in Religion you will fall into despair and repent of it, and have to render an account to God for it, or things like those we have already spoken of; call to your thoughts

the hour of death: you will not then regret that you followed your Vocation, but you will be filled with peace and contentment, instead of the anguish and remorse which would have followed on your having abandoned it. Keep this thought before your mind, and you will not lose your Vocation; you will enjoy in life, and at death, that peace, and hereafter that crown of glory, which God has prepared for His faithful servants.

An Act of Oblation and Prayer which the Novice should make frequently to obtain from God the Grace of Perseverance in his Vocation

My God, how can I ever thank Thee enough for having called me so lovingly to Thy family? How have I merited this grace after having committed so many offences against Thee? How many of my companions are left in the world amidst so many dangers of losing their souls, and in occasions of sin! and I am admitted to Thy House, and to the company of so many of Thy dear servants, and to so great an abundance of all things necessary for my sanctification! I hope one day O Lord, to testify my gratitude to Thee in Heaven, by singing eternally Thy mercies to me. Meanwhile I am all Thine, and desire to be so for ever. I will remain faithful and will never leave Thee, even had I to lay down my life, nay, a thousand lives, for Thy sake. I here dedicate myself to Thy will without reserve. Do with me whatever Thou pleasest. Let me live desolate, infirm, despised, if such be Thy pleasure. It is enough that I obey and please Thee. I desire only the grace to love Thee with all my strength, and to remain faithful to Thee till death. Most Holy Mary, my dear Mother, it is you who have obtained from God the so great graces which I have received, pardon of my sins, my Religious Vocation, and the strength to follow it; accomplish your work and obtain for me Perseverance unto death. This is my hope: so may it be!

SOME ADVICE TO A NOVICE UPON THE MEANS BY WHICH HE MAY PRESERVE HIS FERVOUR

When reproved or accused, never excuse yourself, and love cordially in God the person who accuses or reproves you. Love to be made little of in whatever manner it may be, whether in employment, or dress, or cell, or food, etc. Do not give your opinion unless you are asked.

Mortify yourself in all things, according to prudence and obedience, in eating, in sleeping, in hearing, seeing, etc.

Observe modesty when alone, as well as in the presence of others. Lay not your hand upon any person, nor look steadfastly in his face; keep your eyes continually cast down, especially in the church, at table, during recreation, and when abroad. Observe silence, except when there is need to speak for the glory of God, or for your own or your neighbour's benefit. Be careful particularly during the time of recreation, not to raise your voice too loud. Avoid disputing or talking about your birth, talents, or riches; about eating, hunting, sports, war, or on the means of acquiring honours, riches, and such secular subjects, but endeavour to introduce pious conversation upon the vanity of honours, riches and pleasures of the world, on the love we owe to Jesus and Mary, on the happiness of the Saints, and on the means of advancing in perfection.

If you commit a fault, immediately humble yourself, make an act of contrition, and then rest in peace.

Desire nothing but what God wills.

Seek not consolations; and, in aridity, say to God with entire humility and resignation: "O Lord, I do not deserve consolations; I am content to remain in this state all my life."

Frequently raise your mind to God by means of ejaculations, such as the following:

My God, I desire nothing but Thee, Show me Thy will and I will accomplish it. Do with me what Thou wilt. I desire, O God, whatever Thou wilt. My Jesus, I love Thee, I love Thee. I renounce all; Thou alone are sufficient for me. My God and my all. Jesus our love, and Mary our hope. O good Jesus, mayst Thou be ever praised. My life was Thy death, Thy death is my life.

Evening Meditation

THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED TO MEN BY THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

I.

The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men instructing us that ... we should live ... godly in this world, looking at the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus

Christ (Titus ii. 11).

Consider that by the *grace* that is said to have *appeared* is meant the tender love of Jesus Christ towards men -- a love we have not merited, and which, therefore, is called a "grace." This love was, however, always the same in God, but did not always appear. It was at first promised in many prophecies and foreshadowed by many figures; but at the Birth of the Redeemer this Divine love appeared and manifested itself by the Eternal Word showing Himself to man as an Infant, lying on straw, crying and shivering with cold; beginning thus to make satisfaction for us for the penalties we have deserved, and so making known to us the affection which He bore us, by giving up His life for us: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us* (1 Jo. iii. 16). Therefore the love of our God *appeared to all men*.

But why is it, then, that all men have not known it, and that even to this day so many are ignorant of it? This is the reason: *The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light* (Jo. iii. 19). They have not known Him, and they do not know Him, because they do not wish to know Him, loving the darkness of sin rather than the light of grace.

O my holy Infant! now I see Thee, poor, afflicted and forsaken; but I know that one day Thou wilt come to judge me, seated on a throne of splendour, and attended by the angels. Forgive me, I implore Thee, before Thou hast to judge me. Then Thou wilt have to act as a just Judge; but now Thou art my Redeemer, and the Father of mercy. I have been of those ungrateful ones who have not known Thee, because I did not choose to know Thee, and therefore, instead of being inclined to love Thee by the consideration of the love Thou hast borne me, I only thought of satisfying my own desires, despising Thy grace and Thy love. But into Thy sacred hands I commend my soul, which I have so long neglected; do Thou save it: *Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth* (Ps. xxx. 6).

II.

But let us endeavour not to be of the number of those unhappy souls who are ignorant and ungrateful. If in times past we have shut our eyes to the light, thinking little of the love of Jesus Christ, let us try, during the days that remain to us in this life, to

have ever before our eyes the sufferings and death of our Redeemer, in order to love Him Who has loved us so much: *Looking for the blessed hope and the coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*. Thus may we justly expect, according to the divine promises, that Paradise which Jesus Christ has acquired for us by His Blood. At His first coming Jesus appeared as an Infant, poor and humble, and showed Himself on earth born in a stable, covered with miserable rags, and lying on straw; but at His second coming He will appear as Judge on a throne of majesty: *We shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and majesty* (Matt. xxiv. 30). Blessed then will he be who shall have loved Him, and miserable those who shall not have loved Him.

In Thee do I place all my hopes, knowing that, to ransom me from hell, Thou hast given Thy Blood and Thy life: *Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth*. Thou didst not condemn me to death when I was living in sin, but hast waited for me with infinite patience, in order that, coming to myself, I might repent of having offended Thee, and might begin to love Thee, and that thus Thou mightest be able to forgive and save me. Yes, my Jesus, I will please Thee. I repent, above every other evil, of all the offences I have committed against Thee; I repent, and love Thee above all things. Do Thou save me in Thy mercy, and let it be my salvation to love Thee always in this life and in eternity. My dearest Mother Mary, recommend me to thy Son. Do thou represent to Him that I am thy servant, and that I have placed all my hope in thee. He hears thee, and refuses thee nothing.

December the Twenty-fourth

Morning Meditation

JESUS COMES TO CAST FIRE UPON THE EARTH.

I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled? (Luke xii. 49).

Before the coming of the Messias, who loved God upon the earth? He was known, indeed, in one corner of the world; that is, in Judea; and even there how very few loved Him when He came! Even today few there are who think of preparing their hearts for Jesus to be born in them! What sayest thou? Dost thou

wish to be ranked amongst the ungrateful ones?

I.

The Jews solemnised a day called by them *Dies ignis* - *the day of fire*, in memory of the fire with which Nehemias consumed the sacrifice upon his return from the Captivity of Babylon. Even so, and indeed with more reason, should Christmas Day be called the *Day of Fire* on which a God comes as a little Child to cast the fire of love into the hearts of men.

I am come to cast fire upon the earth; so spoke Jesus Christ. Before the coming of the Messias, who loved God upon the earth? Some worshipped the sun, some the brutes, some the very stones, and others again even viler creatures still. A few years after the Redeemer was born God was more loved by men than He had been before from the creation of man. Ah, truly every man at the sight of a God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such hardship, and to suffer a death of such ignominy, ought to be enkindled with love towards a God so loving! *Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heaven and wouldst come down; the mountains would melt away at thy presence ... the waters would burn with fire* (Is. lxiv. 1). Oh, surely Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls would catch the flame of Thy blessed love! And, in fact, after the Incarnation of the Son of God, how brilliantly has the fire of divine love burnt in loving souls! How many youths, how many of those nobly born, and how many monarchs even, have left wealth, honours, and even kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that there, in poverty and obscure seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves up to the love of their Saviour! How many Martyrs have gone rejoicing, making merry on their way to torments and death! How many tender young virgins have refused the proffered hands of the great ones of the world in order to go and die for Jesus Christ and so repay in some measure the affection of a God Who stooped down to take human flesh and to die for the love of them!

O Jesus, Thou hast spared nothing to induce men to love Thee! O Word Incarnate, Thou wert even made Man to enkindle divine love in our hearts. I love Thee, O Incarnate Word! I love Thee, O sovereign Good! Suffer me not to be separated

from Thee! Suffer me not to be separated from Thee!

II.

It may, indeed, be asserted without fear of contradiction that God was more loved in one century after the coming of Jesus Christ than in the entire forty centuries preceding His appearance on earth. Yes; all this is most true; but now comes a tale for tears. Has this been the case with all men? Have all men sought to correspond with the immense love of Jesus Christ? Alas! my God, the greater number have combined to repay Him with nothing but ingratitude! And you also, my brother, tell me what sort of return have you made up to this time for the love your God has borne you? Have you always shown yourself thankful? Have you ever seriously reflected what these words mean -- *a God to be made Man, a God to die for Thee?*

A certain man while hearing Mass one day without devotion, as too many do, at these concluding words of the last Gospel: *And the Word was made flesh* (Jo. i. 14), made no external act of reverence. At the same moment a devil struck him a blow, saying: "Thankless wretch, thou hearest that a God was made Man for thee, and dost thou not even deign to bend the knee? Oh, if God had done the like for me I should be eternally engaged in thanking Him!"

Tell me, O Christian, what more could Jesus Christ have done to win thy love? If the Son of God had engaged to rescue His own Father from death, to what lower depth of humiliation could He have stooped than to assume human flesh and lay down His life in sacrifice for His salvation? Men appreciate the good graces of a prince, of a prelate, of a nobleman, of a man of letters, and even of a vile animal; and yet these same people set no store by the grace of God, but renounce it for mere smoke, for a brutal gratification, for a handful of earth, for a nothing!

What sayest thou, dear brother? Dost thou wish to be ranked among such ungrateful ones? Go, find thyself a prince more courteous, a master, a brother, a friend more amiable, and one who has shown thee a deeper love.

Ah, how comes it that we are so ungrateful towards God, the same God Who has bestowed His whole self upon us, Who has descended from Heaven to earth, has become an Infant to save

us and to be loved by us? Come, let us love the Babe of Bethlehem! Let us love Jesus Christ Who, in the midst of such sufferings, has sought to attach our hearts to Him.

O my sweet, amiable and holy Child, Thou art at a loss what more to do in order to make Thyself loved by men! And how is it that Thou shouldst have encountered such ingratitude from the majority of men! I see that few, indeed, know Thee, and fewer still love Thee! Ah, my Jesus, I too desire to be reckoned among this small number. But Thou knowest my weakness. Thou knowest my past treasons. For pity's sake do not abandon me, or I shall fall away even worse than before. O Mary, my Mother, thou art the *Mother of fair love* (Ecclus. xxiv. 24), do thou obtain for me the grace to love my God. I hope it of thee.

Spiritual Reading

JESUS COMES TO CALL SINNERS.

I am not come to call the just but sinners (Matt. ix. 13).

St. Thomas of Villanova gives us excellent encouragement, saying: "What art thou afraid of, O sinner? ... How shall He reject thee if thou desirest to retain Him Who came down from Heaven to seek thee?" Let not the sinner, then, be afraid, provided he will be no more a sinner, but will love Jesus Christ; let him not be dismayed, but have full trust; if he abhor and hate sin, and seek God, let him not be sad, but full of joy: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord* (Ps. civ. 3). The Lord has sworn to forget all injuries done to Him, if the sinner is sorry for them: *If the wicked do penance ... I will not remember all his iniquities* (Ezech. xviii. 21). And that we might have every motive for confidence, our Saviour became an Infant: "Who is afraid to approach a Child?" asks the same St. Thomas of Villanova.

"Children do not inspire terror or aversion, but attachment and love," says St. Peter Chrysologus. It seems that children know not how to be angry; and if perchance at odd times they should be irritated, they are easily soothed; one has only to give them a fruit, a flower, or bestow on them a caress, or utter a kind word to them, and they have already forgiven and forgotten every offence.

A tear of repentance, one act of heart-felt contrition, is enough to appease the Infant Jesus. "You know the tempers of

children," St. Thomas of Villanova goes on to say, "a single tear pacifies them, the offence is forgotten. Approach, then, to Him while He is a little One, while He would seem to have forgotten His majesty." He has put off His divine majesty, and appears as a Child to inspire us with more courage to approach His feet.

"He is born as an Infant," says St. Bonaventure, "that neither His justice nor His power might intimidate you." In order to relieve us from every feeling of distrust, which the idea of His power and of His justice might cause in us, He comes before us as a little Babe, full of sweetness and mercy. "O God!" says Gerson, "Thou hast hidden Thy wisdom under a Child's years, that it might not accuse us." O God of mercy, lest Thy divine wisdom might reproach us with our offences against Thee, Thou hast hidden it under an Infant's form. "Thy justice under humility, lest it should condemn." Thou hast concealed Thy justice under the most profound abasement, that it might not condemn us. "Thy power under weakness lest it should punish." Thou hast disguised Thy power in feebleness, that it might not visit us with chastisement.

St. Bernard makes this reflection: "Adam, after his, sin, on hearing the voice of God: *Adam, where art thou?* (Gen. iii. 9), was filled with dismay. -- *I heard thy voice, and was afraid* (Gen. iii. 10)." But, continues the Saint, the Incarnate Word now made Man upon earth, has laid aside all semblance of terror: "Do not fear; He seeks thee, not to punish, but to save thee. Behold, He is a Child; the voice of a child will excite compassion rather than fear. The Virgin Mother wraps His delicate limbs in swaddling-clothes: and art thou still alarmed?" That God Who should punish thee is born an Infant, and has lost all accents to affright thee, since the accents of a child, being cries of weeping, move us rather to pity than to fear; thou canst not fear that Jesus Christ will stretch out His hands to chastise thee, since His Mother is occupied in swathing them in linen bands.

"Be of good cheer, then, O sinners," says St. Leo, "the Birthday of the Lord is the Birthday of peace and joy." *The Prince of peace* (Is. ix. 6), was He called by Isaias. Jesus Christ is a Prince, not of vengeance on sinners, but of mercy and of peace, constituting Himself the Mediator betwixt God and sinners. If

our sins, says St. Augustine, are too much for us, God does not despise His own Blood. If we cannot ourselves make due atonement to the justice of God, at least the Eternal Father knows not how to disregard the Blood of Jesus Christ, Who makes payment for us.

A certain knight, called Don Alphonsus Albuquerque, being on one occasion at sea, and the vessel driven among the rocks by a violent tempest, at once gave himself up for lost; but at that moment seeing near him a little child, crying bitterly, what did he do? He seized him in his arms, and lifting him up towards Heaven, "O Lord," said he, "though I myself am unworthy to be heard, give ear at least to the cries of this innocent child, and save us." At that same instant the storm abated, and all were saved. Let us miserable sinners do in like manner. We have offended God; already has sentence of everlasting death been passed upon us; divine justice requires satisfaction, and rightly. What have we to do? Should we despair? God forbid! Let us offer up to God this Infant, Who is His own Son, and let us address Him with confidence: O Lord, if we cannot of ourselves render Thee satisfaction for our offences against Thee, behold this Child, Who weeps and moans, Who is benumbed with cold on His bed of straw in this cavern; He is here to make atonement for us, and He pleads for Thy mercy on us. Though we ourselves are undeserving of pardon, the tears and sufferings of this Thy guiltless Son merit it for us, and He entreats Thee to pardon us.

This is what St. Anselm advises us to do : he says that Jesus Christ Himself, from His earnest desire not to have us perish, animates each one of us who finds himself guilty before God with these words: O sinner, do not lose heart; if by thy sins thou hast unhappily become the slave of hell, and hast not the means to free thyself, act thus: take Me, offer Me for thyself to the Eternal Father, and so thou shalt escape death, thou shalt be in safety. What can be conceived more full of mercy than what the Son says to us: Take Me, and redeem thyself. This was, moreover, exactly what the divine Mother taught Sister Frances Farnese. She gave the Infant Jesus into her arms, and said to her: "Here is my Son for you; be careful to make His merits your gain by frequently offering Him to His heavenly Father."

And if we would have still another means to secure our forgiveness, let us obtain the intercession of this same divine Mother in our behalf; she is all-powerful with her blessed Son to promote the interests of repentant sinners, as St. John Damascene assures us. Yes, for the prayers of Mary, adds St. Antoninus, have the force of commands with her Son, in consideration of the love He bears her: "The prayer of the Mother of God has the force of a command." Hence St. Peter Damien wrote that when Mary entreats Jesus Christ in favour of one who is dearest to her, "she appears in a certain sense to command as a mistress, not to ask as a handmaid, for the Son honours her by denying her nothing." For this reason St. Germanus says Mary can obtain the pardon of the most abandoned sinners. "Thou, by the power of thy maternal authority, gainest for the most enormous sinners the most excellent grace of pardon."

Evening Meditation

JOSEPH GOES TO BETHLEHEM WITH HIS HOLY SPOUSE.

I.

And Joseph also went up ... to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child (St. Luke ii. 4).

God had decreed that His Son should be born, not in the house of Joseph, but in a cave and stable for animals, in the poorest and most painful way that a child can be born; and therefore He so disposed events that Caesar should publish an Edict that every one should go and enrol himself in the city whence he drew his origin. When Joseph heard this order he was much agitated as to whether he should leave or take with him the Virgin Mother, as she was now near childbirth. My spouse and my lady, said he to her, on the one hand I should not wish to leave you alone; on the other, if I take you, I am afflicted at the thought that you will have to suffer much during this long journey, and in such severe weather. My poverty will not permit me to conduct you with that comfort which you require. But Mary answers him, and encourages him with these words: My Joseph, do not fear; I shall go with you; the Lord will assist us. She knew, by divine inspiration, and also because she was well versed in the prophecy of Micheas, that the Divine Infant was to be born

in Bethlehem. She therefore takes the swathing bands, and the other poor garments already prepared, and departs with Joseph. *And Joseph also went up ... to be enrolled with Mary.*

My dear Redeemer, I know that in this journey Thou wert accompanied by hosts of Angels from Heaven; but here on earth, who was there to bear Thee company? Thou hast only Joseph, and Mary who carries Thee within herself. Disdain not, O my Jesus, to let me also accompany Thee, miserable and ungrateful as I have been. I now see the wrong I have done Thee; Thou didst come down from Heaven to make Thyself my companion on earth, and I by my frequent offences have ungratefully left Thee! When I remember, O my Saviour, that for the sake of my own wicked pleasures, I have so often separated myself from Thee and renounced Thy friendship, I could wish to die of sorrow. But Thou didst come into the world to pardon me; pardon me then quickly, for I repent with all my soul of having so often turned my back upon Thee and forsaken Thee. I purpose and I hope, through Thy grace, never more to leave Thee, or separate myself from Thee, O my only Love!

II.

Let us consider the devout and holy discourses which these two saintly spouses must have held together during the journey, concerning the mercy, goodness, and love of the Divine Word, Who was shortly to be born, and to appear on earth for the salvation of men. Let us also consider the praises, the blessings, the thanksgivings, the acts of humility and love, which these two illustrious pilgrims uttered on their way. This holy Virgin, so soon to become a Mother, certainly suffered much in so long a journey, made in the midst of Winter, and over rough roads; but she suffered in peace and with love. She offered to God all these her sufferings, uniting them to those of Jesus, Whom she carried in her womb. Oh, let us also unite ourselves with Mary and Joseph, and accompany them in the journey of our life; and, with them, let us accompany the King of Heaven, Who is about to be born in a cave, and make His first appearance in the world as an Infant, but an Infant the poorest and most forsaken that was ever born amongst men. And let us beseech Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, that, through the merits of the sufferings which they

endured in this journey, they would accompany us in the journey that we are making to eternity. Oh, happy shall we be, if in life and in death, we are always accompanied by these Three Great Personages!

My soul has become enamoured of Thee, O my amiable Infant-God. I love Thee, my sweet Saviour; and since Thou hast come upon earth to save me and to dispense to me Thy graces, this one grace only do I ask of Thee: never permit me to separate myself from Thee again. Unite me, bind me to Thyself, enchain me with the sweet cords of Thy holy love. O my Redeemer and my God, who will, then, have the heart to leave Thee, and to live without Thee, deprived of Thy grace? Most holy Mary, I come to accompany thee on this journey; and thou; O my Mother, cease not to accompany me in the journey I am making to eternity. Assist me always, but especially when I shall find myself at the end of my life, and near that moment on which will depend either my remaining always with thee to love Jesus in Paradise, or my being for ever separated from thee and hating Jesus in hell. My Queen, save me by thy intercession; and let my salvation be in loving thee and Jesus for ever, in time and in eternity. Thou art my hope; I hope for all from thee.

Christmas Day

Morning Meditation

"THIS DAY IS BORN TO YOU A SAVIOUR."

Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people, for this day is born to you a Saviour. (Luke ii. 10, 11).

Arise, all ye nobles and peasants! Mary invites all -- rich and poor, just and sinners, to enter the Cave of Bethlehem to adore, and to kiss the feet of her new-born Son. Come then, all ye devout souls -- come in and see the Creator of Heaven and earth on a little hay under the form of a little Infant; the power of God, as it were, annihilated, and the wisdom of God become mad, through excess of love! I come, then, dear Jesus, to kiss Thy feet and offer Thee my heart.

I.

Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy ... This day is born to you a Saviour! And what tidings could be a greater joy to a race

of poor exiles condemned to death, than to be told that their Saviour was come, not only to deliver them from death, but to obtain for them liberty to return to their own country? And this is what the Angels announce to you: *A Saviour is born to you!* Jesus Christ is born to you to deliver you from everlasting death, and to open Heaven to you, our true country from which we were banished because of our sins.

No sooner had Mary entered the cavern than she began to pray; and the hour of her delivery being come, behold she sees a great light, and feels in her heart a heavenly joy. She casts down her eyes -- and, O God, what does she see? An Infant so tender and beautiful that He fills her with love! But He trembles and cries and stretches out His arms to show that He desires that she should take Him up into her bosom. "I stretched forth My hands to seek the caresses of My Mother," as Jesus said to St. Brigid. Mary calls Joseph. "Come Joseph, come and see, for the Son of God is now born." The old man entered, and prostrating himself, wept for joy.

Mary, holding Him to her bosom, adores Him as her God, kissing His face as her Child. She then hastily seeks to cover Him and wraps Him up in swaddling clothes. But, O God, how hard and rough these clothes are! They are the clothes of the poor, and they are cold and damp, and in that cave there is no fire to warm them.

Let us arise and enter, the door is open. There are no satellites to say that this is not the hour. The Cave is open and without guards or doors, so that all may go in when they please to seek Him and to speak to Him, and even to embrace their Infant King if they love and desire Him.

Lord, I should not have dared to approach Thee seeing myself so deformed by sin; but since Thou, my Jesus, dost invite me so courteously, and dost call me so lovingly, I will not refuse. After having so many times turned my back upon Thee I will not add a fresh insult by refusing, out of distrust, this affectionate, this loving invitation. It is true my heart offended Thee at one time, but now it is penitent. I confess that I have been a traitor, cruel and ungrateful, that it is I who have caused Thee to suffer so much and made Thee shed so many tears in the stable of

Bethlehem, but Thy tears are my hope. I am a sinner, it is true, and I do not deserve to be pardoned, but I come before Thee, Who being God hast become a little Child to obtain pardon for me. Eternal Father, if I deserve hell, look upon the tears of Thy innocent Son. He asks Thee to pardon me this night, a night of joy, of pardon and salvation.

II.

Let every soul, then, enter the Cave of Bethlehem. Behold and see that tender Infant, Who is weeping as He lies in the manger on that miserable straw. See how beautiful He is: look at the light which He sends forth, and the love which He breathes; those eyes send out arrows which wound the hearts that desire Him; the very stable, the very straw cry out, says St. Bernard, and tell you to love Him Who loves you; to love God Who is infinite Love, and Who came down from Heaven, and Made Himself a little Child, and became poor, to make you understand the love He bears you, and to gain your love by His sufferings.

Come and say to Him: "Ah, beautiful Infant! tell me whose Child art Thou?" He replies: "My Mother is this pure and lovely Virgin who is standing by Me." "And Who is Thy Father?" "My Father," He says, "is God." "How is this? Thou art the Son of God, and art so poor; and why? Who will acknowledge Thee in such a condition? Who will respect Thee?" "Ah," replies Jesus, "holy Faith will make known Who I am, and will make Me loved by those whose souls I come to redeem and to inflame with My love." I am not come, says He, to make Myself feared, but to make Myself loved; and therefore I wished to show Myself to you for the first time as a poor and humble Infant, that, seeing to what My love for you has reduced Me, you might love Me the more. But tell me, my sweet Infant, why dost Thou turn Thine eyes on every side? What art Thou looking for? I hear Thee sigh; tell me wherefore are these sighs? O God! I see Thee weep; tell me wherefore dost Thou weep? Yes, replies Jesus, I turn My eyes around; for I am seeking for some soul that desires Me. I sigh out of desire to see Myself near to a heart that burns for Me, as I burn with love for it. But I weep; and it is because I see but few souls, who seek Me and, wish to love Me.

Come, then, O all ye devout souls. Jesus invites you to come

and kiss His feet this night. The shepherds who came to visit Him in the stable of Bethlehem brought their gifts; you must also bring your gifts. What will you bring Him? The most acceptable present you can bring Him is that of a contrite and loving heart.

O Jesus, Thou must know that I am poor and that I have nothing to give Thee. I have nothing but my penitent heart. This I now offer Thee. Yes, O Infant, I repent of ever having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon from Thee. But the forgiveness of my sins alone is not sufficient for me. On this night Thou dost grant great spiritual graces; I also desire that Thou shouldst bestow a great grace on me -- it is, the grace to love Thee. Now that I am about to approach Thy feet, inflame me wholly with Thy holy love, and bind me to Thee; but bind me so effectually that I may never more be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O my God, Who didst become a little Child for my sake; but I love Thee very little; I desire to love Thee very much, and Thou hast to enable me to do it. I come, then, to kiss Thy feet, and I offer Thee my heart; I leave it in Thy hands; I will have it no longer; do Thou change it and keep it forever; do not give it back to me again; for if Thou dost, I fear lest it should betray Thee afresh.

Most holy Mary, thou who art the Mother of this great Son, but who art also my Mother, it is to thee that I consecrate my poor heart; present it to Jesus and He will not refuse to receive it when presented by thee. Do thou, then, present it, and beg Him to accept it.

Spiritual Reading

THE ETERNAL WORD, BEING GREAT, BECOMES LITTLE.

Plato says that love is the "loadstone of love."

Hence the Proverb: "If you wish to be loved, love." But, my Jesus, this rule, this Proverb holds good for others, holds good for all, but not for Thee! Thou art at a loss what further to do to show men the love Thou bearest them! And yet how many are there that love Thee? Alas, the greatest number, we may say nearly all, not only do not love Thee -- they offend Thee and despise Thee!

And shall we stand in the ranks of these heartless wretches? God has not deserved this at our hands -- that God, so good, so

tender to us, Who, being great, has thought it fit to make Himself little in order to be loved by us.

To understand the immense love of God towards men in becoming Man and a feeble Child for our love, it would be necessary to comprehend His greatness. But what mind of man or Angel can conceive the Infinite greatness of God?

St. Ambrose says that to say God is greater than the heavens, than all kings, all Saints, all Angels, is to do an injury to God; just as it would be an injury to a prince to say that he was greater than a blade of grass, or a little fly. God is Greatness itself, and all greatness together is but the smallest atom of the greatness of God.

David, contemplating the divine greatness, and seeing that he could not and never would be able to comprehend it, could only say: *O Lord, who is like to thee?* (Ps. xxxiv. 10). O Lord, what greatness shall ever be found like Thine? And how in truth could David ever be able to comprehend it, since his understanding was but *finite*, and God's greatness *infinite*? *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of his greatness there is no end* (Ps. cxliv. 3). *Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord* (Jer. xxiii. 24). Thus all of us, according to our mode of understanding, are nothing but so many miserable little fishes, living in this immense ocean of the essence of God: *In him we live and move and have our being* (Acts xvii. 28).

What are we then in respect to God? And what are all men, all monarchs of earth, and even all Saints and all Angels of Heaven, compared with the infinite greatness of God? We are all like, or even smaller than, a grain of sand in comparison with the rest of the earth: *Behold*, says the Prophet Isaias, *the Gentiles are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold, the islands are as a little dust ... All nations are before him as if they had no being at all* (Is. xl. 15, 17).

Now this God so great has become a little Infant; and for whom? *A child is born to us* (Is. ix. 6): for us He is born. And wherefore? St. Ambrose gives us the answer: "He is a little One, that you may be a perfect man; He is bound in swaddling-clothes, that you may be unbound from the fetters of death; He is on earth, that you may be in Heaven."

Behold, then, Immensity Whom the heavens cannot contain, become an Infant: see Him imprisoned in poor rags, and laid in a narrow, vile manger on a bundle of Straw, which was at once His only bed and pillow. "See," says St. Bernard -- "see Power ruled, Wisdom instructed, Virtue sustained. God taking milk and weeping, yet comforting the afflicted!" A God Almighty so tightly wrapped in swathing-bands that He cannot stir! A God Who knows all things made mute and speechless! A God Who rules Heaven and earth needing to be carried in the arms! A God Who feeds all men and animals, Himself having need of a little milk to support Him! A God Who consoles the afflicted and is the joy of Paradise, Himself weeps and moans and has to be comforted by a creature!

For this, then, did the Eternal Word become Man. For this, moreover, He became an Infant. Little children are loved. To see them is to love them.

St. Peter Chrysologus writes: "How should our Lord come, Who wished to drive away fear and to seek love? What breast so savage as not to soften before such a Childhood as this? What hardness will it not subdue; what love does it not claim? Thus, therefore, He wished to be born Who willed to be loved and not feared." The Saint would say that if our Redeemer had come in order to be feared and respected by men, He should have come as a full grown Man and with royal dignity, but because He came to gain our love He chose to come and to show Himself as an Infant, and the poorest of infants, born in a cold stable between two animals, laid in a manger on straw, without clothing or fire to warm His shivering little limbs: "thus would He be born Who willed to be loved and not feared." Ah, my Lord! what was it that drew Thee from Heaven to be born in a stable? It was love, the love Thou bearest towards men. What took Thee from the right hand of Thy Father, where Thou sittest, and placed Thee in a manger? What snatched Thee from Thy throne above the stars, and made Thee to lie on a little straw? What changed Thy position from amidst the Angels, to be placed betwixt two beasts? It was all the work of love; Thou inflamest the Seraphim, and dost Thou not shiver with cold? Thou supportest the heavens, and must Thou be now carried in the arms? Thou providest

food for men and beasts, and now dost Thou crave a little milk to sustain Thy life? Thou makest the Seraphim happy, and now dost Thou weep and moan? What has reduced Thee to such misery? Love has done it: "Thus would He be born Who willed to be loved and not feared."

Love, then, love, O souls, exclaims St. Bernard, love now this little Child, for He is exceedingly to be loved. "Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised. The Lord is little, and exceedingly to be loved." Yes, says the Saint, this God, existing from eternity, is worthy of all praise and reverence for His greatness, as David has sung: *Great is the Lord and exceedingly to be praised* (Ps. cxliv. 3). But now that we behold Him become a little Infant, needing milk, and unable to move Himself, trembling with cold, moaning and weeping, looking for some one to take and warm and comfort Him; ah, now indeed does He become the most cherished One of our hearts! "The Lord is little, and exceedingly to be loved!"

We ought to adore Him as our God, but our love ought to keep pace with our reverence towards a God so amiable, so loving.

St. Bonaventure reminds us that "a child finds its delights with other children, with flowers, and to be in the arms." The Saint's meaning is, that if we would please this divine Infant, we too must become children, simple and humble; we must bring to Him flowers of virtue, of meekness, of mortification, of charity; we must clasp Him in the arms of our love.

And, O man, adds St. Bernard, what more do you wait to see before you will give yourself wholly to God? See with what labour, with what ardent love, your Jesus has come down from Heaven to seek you. Harken, how, though scarcely yet born, His wailings call to you as if He would say: O soul, it is thee I am seeking! For thee and to obtain thy love, I am come from Heaven to earth. "Having scarcely quitted the Virgin's womb," says the Saint, "He calls thy beloved soul after the manner of infants: A! A! *anima mea, anima mea, te quaero!* Ah! Ah! my soul, my soul, I am seeking Thee! For thee I am making this pilgrimage!"

O God, even the very brutes, if we do them a kindness, if we give them some trifle, are so grateful for it; they come near

us, they do our bidding after their own fashion, and they show gladness at our approach. And how comes it, then, that we are so ungrateful towards God, the same God Who has bestowed His whole Self upon us, Who has descended from Heaven to earth, and has become an Infant to save us and to be loved by us.

Come, let us love the Babe of Bethlehem! is the enraptured cry of St. Francis. Let us love Jesus Christ Who has sought in the midst of such sufferings to attach our hearts to Him.

Evening Meditation

THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN BETHLEHEM.

I.

The birth of Jesus Christ brought universal joy to the whole world. He was the Redeemer Who had been desired and sighed after for so many years; and therefore He was called the Desired of the nations, and the Desire of the eternal hills. Behold Him already come, and born in a little cave. Let us consider that this day the Angel announces to us also the same great joy that he announced to the shepherds: *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour* (Luke ii. 10).

What rejoicing there is in a country when the heir is born to a king! But surely we ought to keep still greater festival when we see the Son of God born and come down from Heaven to visit us, urged to this by the tenderness of His mercy: *Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us* (Luke i. 78). We were lost; and behold Him Who came to save us: *He came down from Heaven for our salvation* (Symb. Nic.). Behold the Shepherd Who came to save His sheep from death by giving His life for their sake: *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep* (John x. 11). Behold the Lamb of God, Who came to sacrifice Himself, to obtain for us the divine favour, and to become our Deliverer, our Life, our Light, and even our Food in the most Holy Sacrament!

I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek thy servant (Is. ix. 6). O Lord I am that sheep which, by following after my own pleasures and caprices, have miserably lost myself; but Thou, Who art at once the Shepherd and divine Lamb, art He Who came down from Heaven to save me by sacrificing Thyself as a

victim on the Cross in satisfaction for my sins. *Behold, the Lamb of God; behold him who taketh away the sins of the world* (Ps. cxviii. 176). If, therefore, I desire to amend my life, what need I fear? Why should I not confide entirely in Thee, O my Saviour, Who wert born on purpose to save me? *Behold, God is my saviour; I will put my trust in him, and will not fear* (Is. xii. 2). What greater proof couldst Thou give me of Thy mercy, O my dearest Redeemer, to inspire me with confidence, than to give me Thyself? O my dear Infant, how grieved I am that I have offended Thee! I have made Thee weep in the stable of Bethlehem. But since Thou art come to seek me, I throw myself at Thy feet; and although I behold Thee afflicted and humbled, lying upon straw in the manger, I acknowledge Thee for my supreme King, and Sovereign. I feel that Thy tender infant-cries invite me to love Thee, and demand my heart. Behold, my Jesus, I present it today at Thy feet; change it and inflame it, O Thou Who didst come into the world to inflame the hearts of men with Thy holy love.

II.

St. Maximus says that for this reason amongst others, Christ chose to be laid in the manger where the animals were fed, to make us understand that He had become Man also to make Himself our Food: "In the manger, where the food of animals is placed, He allowed His limbs to be laid, thereby showing that His own body would be the eternal Food of men." Besides this, He is born every day in the Blessed Sacrament in the hands of the Priest at holy Mass; the Altar is the Crib, and there we go to feed ourselves on His flesh. Some one might desire to have the holy Infant in his arms, as the aged Simeon had; but Faith teaches us that, when we receive Communion, the same Jesus Who was in the manger of Bethlehem is not only in our arms, but in our breasts. He was born for this purpose, to give Himself entirely to us: *A child is born to us, a son is given to us* (Is. ix. 6).

I hear Thee, O my Jesus, say to me in Thy manger: *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart* (Is. xii. 2). And I will answer: Ah, my Jesus, if I do not love Thee, Who art my Lord and my God, whom shall I love? Thou callest Thyself mine, because Thou wert born in order to give Thyself entirely to me; and shall I refuse to be Thine? No, my beloved Lord, I give myself entirely to

Thee; and I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee, O sovereign Good, the one only Love of my soul. I beseech Thee accept me this day, and do not permit me evermore to cease to love Thee. O Mary, my Queen, I pray thee, through that consolation which thou didst enjoy the first time thou didst behold thy new-born Son and didst give Him thy first kiss, beseech Him to accept me for His servant, and to enchain me forever to Himself by the gift of His holy love.

December the Twenty-Sixth

Morning Meditation

"THE REDEMPTION OF HIS PEOPLE."

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people (Luke i. 68).

Heretofore we were all slaves of hell. But what has the Eternal Word and Sovereign Lord done to free us from this slavery? Ah, who would have believed it if holy Faith did not assure us of it? Who could ever have conceived it? But holy Faith tells us and assures us that this Supreme and Sovereign Lord, *being in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant* -- to release us from the slavery of our deadly foe.

I.

Almighty God is Lord of all that is, or that can be, in this world, and yet He did not rule over the hearts of mankind that was groaning under the miserable tyranny of the devil. Before the coming of Jesus Christ this tyrant was lord, and even made himself worshipped by men as a god, with incense and sacrifices, not only of animals, but even of their own children and of their very lives. And he, their enemy and tyrant, what return did he make them? How did he treat them? He tortured their bodies with the most barbarous cruelty, he blinded their minds, and by a path of pain and misery conducted them unto everlasting torments. It was this tyrant that the Divine Word came to overthrow, and thereby to release mankind from his wretched thralldom, in order that unfortunate creatures, freed from the darkness of death, rescued from the bondage of this savage monster, and enlightened as to what was the true Way of Salvation, might serve their real and lawful Master, Who loved them as a Father

and, from being slaves of Satan, wished to make them His own beloved children: *That being delivered from the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear* (Luke i. 74). Our Saviour came, then, to release us from the slavery of this deadly foe; but how? -- in what manner did He release us? Let us learn from St. Paul what He did: *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men* (Phil. ii. 6).

O my Jesus, Thou hast been pleased to become a servant for love of me, and in order to release me from the chains of hell; and not only the servant of Thy Father but of men and of executioners, even to the laying down of Thy life! And I, for the love of some wretched, poisonous pleasure, have so often forsaken Thy service, and have become the slave of the devil! A thousand times over I curse those moments in which, by a wicked abuse of my free will, I despised Thy grace, O Infinite Majesty. In pity pardon me, and bind me to Thyself with those delightful chains of love with which Thou keepest Thy chosen souls in closest contact with Thee. I love Thee, O Incarnate Word! I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good! O, never suffer me to be separated from Thee again.

II.

Our Saviour Jesus was, says the Apostle St. Paul, the only-begotten Son of God, equal to His Father, eternal as His Father, almighty as His Father, immense, most wise, most happy, and sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth, of Angels and of men, no less than His Father; but for love of man He stooped to the lowly form of a servant, clothing Himself in human flesh, and likening Himself to men; and since sin had made them vassals of the devil, He came in the form of man to redeem them, offering His sufferings and death in satisfaction to the divine justice for the punishment due to them. Ah! who would have believed it, if holy Faith did not assure us of it? Who could ever have hoped for it? Who could ever have conceived it? But Faith tells us that this supreme and sovereign Lord *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant*.

From His tenderest childhood, the Redeemer, by becoming a servant, was eager to begin and wrench from the devil that

dominion which he had over man, according to the prophecy of Isaias: *Call his name – Hasten to take away the spoils: Make haste to take away the prey* (Is. viii. 3). "That is," as St. Jerome explains it, "suffer the devil to reign no longer." Behold Jesus, scarcely born, says the Venerable Bede, before He is registered in the Census of Cesar, and for our liberation "is Himself inscribed in the list of servitude." Observe how, in token of His servitude, He begins to pay off our debts by His sufferings; how He allows Himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes (a type of the cords which should bind Him at a later day, to be led to death by cruel executioners). "God suffers Himself," says a certain author, "to be bound up in swaddling-bands, because He had come to release the world from its debts."

I beseech Thee, O my Jesus, by all the sufferings of Thy life and death, do not suffer me ever more to leave Thee! Suffer me not to be separated from Thee! Suffer me not to be separated from Thee!

O Mary, my refuge, thou hast hitherto been my sweet advocate, for it is thou who didst prevail on God still to wait for me and to pardon me with so much mercy. Succour me now, and obtain for me the grace to die, and to die a thousand times, rather than ever again to lose the grace of God. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

Well may the words addressed by Moses to God in regard to the children of Israel, after their delivery from the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the bondage of Egypt, be applied to Religious: *In thy mercy thou hast been a leader to the people which thou hast redeemed, and in thy strength thou hast carried them to thy holy habitation* (Exod. xv. 13). As the Hebrews, compared with the Egyptians, were, in the Old Law, the beloved people of God, so are Religious, contrasted with seculars, in the New Law. And as the Hebrews went forth from Egypt, a land of labour and slavery, where God was not known, so Religious retire from the world, which gives to its servants no other recompense than pains and bitterness and in which God is but little known. Finally, as the Hebrews in the desert were guided by a pillar of fire to the Land of Promise, so Religious are conducted by the light of the Holy Ghost into

the sanctuary of Religion, which is like the Promised Land of Heaven. In Heaven there is no thirst for earthly riches, or for sensual pleasures, or of doing one's own will; in the cloister, by means of the holy Vows of Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity, these pernicious desires are effectually excluded. In Heaven, to praise God is the constant occupation of the Saints, and in Religion, it is the same, since every act of the Community is referred to the glory of His Name. "You praise God," says St. Augustine, "by the discharge of every duty; you praise Him when you eat or drink; you praise Him when you rest or sleep." Religious praise the Lord by regulating the affairs of the monastery, by assisting in the sacristy, or at the grate; they praise God when they go to table; and they praise Him when they retire to rest and sleep; in a word they praise God in everything they do. Lastly, in Heaven the Saints enjoy continual peace; because they find in God the Source of every good; and, in Religion, where God alone is sought, is found that peace which surpasses all understanding, and contentment which the world cannot give. Well, then, might St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi say, that Religious should have a high esteem and veneration for their state; since, *after Baptism, a Vocation to Religion is the greatest grace which God can bestow.*

You should, therefore, hold the Religious state in higher esteem than all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth. In that state you are preserved from sins, which you would commit in the world; there you are constantly occupied in holy exercises; there you have every day opportunities of meriting eternal joys; there you are the spouse of Jesus Christ, and, after this short life, He will make you to reign in the eternal kingdom of His glory. How is it that this grace is yours in preference to so many others more worthy than you? Black, indeed, must be your ingratitude if you do not, with all the love of your heart, thank God every day for the great grace of your Vocation. No one has described the advantages of the Religious state better than St. Bernard. The holy Doctor asks: "Is not the Religious state holy, in which a man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed with grace more frequently, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purified more quickly, and rewarded more abundantly?" Let us examine these

advantages one by one, and see the great treasures which each of them contains.

I. VIVIT PURIUS-A RELIGIOUS LIVES MORE PURE- LY

All the works of Religious, considered in themselves, are most pure and acceptable before God. This great purity consists in doing what we do solely to please God. Hence, our actions will be agreeable to God in proportion to their conformity to His holy will, and to their freedom from self-will. The actions of a secular, however holy and fervent they may be, partake more of self-will than those of Religious. Seculars pray, receive Holy Communion, hear Mass, make Spiritual Reading, take the discipline, and recite the Divine Office when they please. But a Religious performs these duties at a time prescribed by obedience -- that is, when God wills them, for it is God Himself speaks through obedience. Hence, a Religious, who obeys his Rule and superiors, merits, not only by his prayers and other spiritual duties, but also by his labours, his recreations, his attendance at the door, his meals, his amusements, and his repose. For, in doing these things, not through self-will, but by obedience, he does in each the holy will of God, and by each gains merit.

Oh! how often does not self-will vitiate the most holy actions! Alas! to how many, on the day of judgment, when they shall ask, in the words of Isaías, the reward of their labours -- *Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded? -- have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?* -- to how many, I say, will not our Lord answer -- What pretence! Reward for *you!* *Behold in the day of your fast your own will was found* (Is. lviii. 3). Have you not, in doing your own will, already received the recompense of your toil? Have you not, in all your works, sought your own pleasure rather than Mine? Abbot Gilbert says that the smallest work of a Religious is more meritorious than the greatest action of a secular. St. Bernard asserts that if a person in the world did the fourth part of what is ordinarily done by Religious, he would be venerated as a saint. And has not experience shown, that the virtues of many, whose sanctity shone resplendent in the world, faded away before the bright example of the fervent souls, whom, on entering Religion, they found in the cloister? A Religious, then,

because in all his actions he does the will of God, can truly say that he belongs entirely to Him. The Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, Foundress of the Convent of Tolouse, used to say that she entertained a high esteem for her Vocation -- first, because a Religious enjoys the society of Jesus Christ, Who, in the Blessed Sacrament, dwells with her in the same house; and secondly, because a Religious, having by the vow of obedience sacrificed her own will and her whole being to God, belongs unreservedly to Him.

Evening Meditation

JESUS IS BORN AN INFANT.

I.

Consider that the first sign which the Angel gave to the shepherds, by which to discover the new-born Messias, was, that they would find Him in the form of an Infant: *You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger* (Luke ii. 12). The littleness of infants is a great attraction for love; but a still greater attraction must the littleness of the Infant Jesus be to us, Who, being the incomprehensible God, has made Himself small for the love of us. For our sake He has become a little Child.

Adam came into the world at a full age; but the Eternal Word chose to appear as an Infant -- *a child is born to us* -- that He might thus attract our hearts to Himself with greater force. So would He be born Who willed to be loved. He came into the world not to inspire terror, but to be loved; and for this reason He preferred to show Himself at His first appearance, as a tender, weak Infant. "Our Lord is great, and greatly to be praised," says St. Peter Chrysologus. My Lord is great, and therefore He deserves highly to be praised on account of His Infinite Majesty. But when the Saint considered Him as a little Child in the stable of Bethlehem, he exclaimed with tenderness: "My Lord is a little Child and greatly to be loved." My great and supreme God has made Himself little for me, and deserves my love.

Ah, how is it possible that any one can reflect with faith on a God become a little Child, crying and weeping on the straw in a cave, and yet not love Him, and invite all men to love Him, as did St. Francis of Assisi, who said: "Let us love the Child of Bethlehem, let us love the Child of Bethlehem." He is an Infant;

He does not speak, He only cries; but, O my God, are not these cries all voices of love, with which He invites us to love Him, and demands our hearts!

Eternal Father, I, a miserable sinner, worthy of hell, have nothing of my own to offer Thee in satisfaction for my sins; I offer Thee the tears, the sufferings, the blood, the death of this Infant, Who is Thy Son; and through them I implore pity from Thee. If I had not this Son to offer Thee, I should be lost; there would be no longer any hope for me; but Thou hast given Him to me for this purpose, in order that, in offering Thee His merits, I might have a good hope of my salvation. My ingratitude, O Lord, is great; but Thy mercy is still greater. And what greater mercy could I hope for from Thee, than that Thou shouldst give me Thy own Son for my Redeemer, and as the Victim for my sins. For the love, therefore, of Jesus Christ, forgive me all the offences that I have committed against Thee, of which I repent with my whole heart, because by them I have offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. And for the sake of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee holy perseverance.

II.

Let us consider, moreover, that infants also gain our affection because we consider them innocent; but all other infants are born with the infection of original sin. Jesus was born an Infant, but He was born holy -- *holy, innocent, undefiled* (Heb. vii. 26). My beloved, says the holy Spouse, is all ruddy with love, and all white with innocence, without a spot of any sin: *My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands* (Cant. v. 10). In this Infant did the Eternal Father find His delight, because, as St. Gregory says, "in Him alone He found no fault."

Let us miserable sinners comfort ourselves, because this Divine Infant has come down from Heaven to communicate His Innocence to us by means of His Passion. His merits, if we only knew how to apply them to ourselves, can change us from sinners into innocents and saints: in these merits let us place all our confidence; through them let us continually ask for graces from the Eternal Father, and we shall obtain everything.

O my God, if I should again offend Thee, after Thou hast waited for me with so much patience, after Thou hast assisted

me with so much light, and forgiven me with so much love -- I should indeed deserve a special hell for myself. O my Father, do not forsake me, I pray Thee. I tremble when I think of the number of times I have betrayed Thee; how many times I have promised to love Thee, and then have again turned my back upon Thee? O my Creator, let me not have to lament the misfortune of seeing myself again deprived of Thy favour. Permit me not to be separated from Thee! Permit me not to be separated from Thee! I repeat it, and will repeat it to my very last breath; and do Thou always give me the grace to repeat to Thee this prayer: Permit me not to be separated from Thee! My Jesus, my dearest Infant, enchain me with Thy love. I love Thee and will always love Thee. Permit me not to be ever again separated from Thy love. I love thee, too, my Mother; oh, do thou also love me. And if thou lovest me, this is the favour I beg thee to obtain for me -- that I may never cease to love my God.

December the Twenty-Seventh

Morning Meditation

AND WITH HIM THERE IS PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION

(Ps. cxxix. 7).

Great had been the sin of man, but greater, the Apostle says, has been the gift of Redemption. *Not as the offence so also the gift* (Rom. v. 15). It was not only *sufficient*, but *superabundant*. *And with him plentiful redemption*. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O most lovable God!

I.

Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem ... for her evil is come to an end (Is. xl. 1, 2). The reason is, God Himself has discovered a way of saving man, while at the same time His justice and His mercy shall both be satisfied. *Justice and peace have kissed* (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). The Son of God has Himself become Man, has taken the form of a sinner. *He appeared to take away our sins*, says St. John (1 Jo. iii. 5). He presented Himself before His heavenly Father and offered Himself to pay for mankind; and then the Father sent Him on earth to take the appearance of sinful man, and to be made in all things like to sinners: *God sending his own Son in the likeness of*

sinful flesh (Rom. viii. 3). And St. Paul adds: *And of sin condemned sin in the flesh* (Ibid.).

God, therefore, in order to save mankind, and at the same time to satisfy the claims of His Justice, was pleased to condemn His own Son to a painful life, and a shameful death. And can this be true? Jesus Christ Himself affirms it: *God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son* (Jo. iii. 16). What! a God condescends to love men, miserable worms, who have been rebellious and ungrateful towards Him; and to love them to such an extent as to give His only-begotten Son, One Whom He loved as much as Himself! Not a servant, not an Angel, not an Archangel, did He give, but His own Son! He gave Him to us lowly, poor, despised; He gave Him into the hands of slaves, to be treated as a miscreant, even to be put to death, covered with shame, on an infamous gibbet. O grace! O the strength of the love of God! exclaims St. Bernard.

O my Redeemer and my God, and who am I that Thou shouldst have loved me, and still continuest to love me so much! What hast Thou ever received from me that has obliged Thee so to love me? What, except slights and provocations, which were a reason for Thee to abandon me, and to banish me for ever from Thy face! But, O Lord, I accept of every penalty except this! Pardon me, O my beloved Infant, for I am sorry with my whole heart. O Mary, my Mother, thou art my hope and the refuge of sinners.

II.

Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage and fear not ... God Himself will come and will save you (Is. xxxv. 4). Be no longer in despair, O poor sinners! What fear can you have that you will not be pardoned when the Son of God comes down from Heaven to save you? If you cannot by your own works appease an offended God, behold One Who can appease Him! This very Infant Whom you now see reposing on straw, and weeping -- He with His tears, propitiates Him. You have no grounds for being sad any more, says St. Leo, on account of the sentence of death fulminated against you, now that Life Itself is born for you -- "nor is there any lawful reason for sadness when it is the Birthday of Life." And St. Augustine: "O sweet day for penitents! today sin is taken

away, and shall the sinner despair?" If you are unable to render due satisfaction to the divine justice, look on Jesus Who does penance for you. Already does He commence to do it in this little Cave, and He will persevere in doing penance all His life and finally bring it to an end only on the Cross to which, according to St. Paul, He affixed the decree of your condemnation cancelling it in His own Blood: *Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross*(Coloss. ii. 14).

Pardon me, O my beloved Infant, for I am sorry with my whole heart for every single displeasure I have given Thee. O Redeemer, and Redeemer again and again of my soul! my soul is now enamoured of Thee and loves Thee. Thou hast loved me above measure, so that, overcome by Thy love, I could no longer resist its winning appeals. I love Thee, then, O Infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O most lovable God! Do Thou never cease to enkindle more and more in my heart the flames and fiery darts of love. For Thy own glory cause Thyself to be greatly loved by one who has greatly offended Thee. O Mary, assist a poor sinner who desires to prove faithful to God. Help me to love Him and to love Him exceedingly.

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

II. CADIT RARIUS-THE RELIGIOUS FALLS MORE RARELY.

Religious are certainly less exposed to the danger of sin than seculars. Almighty God represented the world to St. Anthony, and before him to St. John the Evangelist, as a place full of snares. Hence, the holy Apostle said that in the world there is nothing but the *concupiscence of the flesh*, that is, carnal pleasures; the *concupiscence of the eyes*, or earthly riches; and the *pride of life*, or worldly honours, which swell the heart with pride. In Religion these poisoned sources of sin are cut off by the holy vows; for by the Vow of Chastity a Religious bids adieu to the pleasures of sense; by the Vow of Poverty the desire of riches is eradicated, and by the Vow of Obedience the ambition of empty honours is extinguished.

It is, indeed, possible for a Christian to live in the world

detached from its goods; but he who handles pitch, as the saying is, easily blackens his hands. *The whole world*, says St. John, *is seated in wickedness* (1 Jo. v. 19). St. Ambrose, in his comment on this passage, says that they who remain in the world live under the miserable despotism of sin. The atmosphere of the world is noxious and pestilential for the soul, and he who breathes it easily catches some spiritual infirmity. Human respect, bad example, and evil conversations, are powerful incitements to earthly attachments, and to estrangement of the soul from God. Every one knows that the damnation of numberless souls is attributable to the occasions of sin so common in the world. From these occasions Religious who live in the retirement of the cloister are far removed. Hence St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was accustomed to embrace the walls of her convent, saying: "O blessed walls! O blessed walls! from how many dangers do you not preserve me!" Hence, also, blessed Mary Magdalen Orsini, whenever she saw a Religious laugh, used to say: "Laugh and rejoice, dear sister, for you have reason to be happy, being far away from the dangers of the world."

III. SURGIT VELOCIOUS-A RELIGIOUS RISES MORE SPEEDILY.

If a Religious should be so unfortunate as to fall into sin, he has, at least, the most efficacious helps to rise again. His Rule, which obliges him to frequent the holy Sacrament of Penance; his meditations, in which he is reminded of the Eternal Truths; the good example of his companions, and the reproofs of his superiors, are powerful helps to rise from his fallen state. *Woe*, says the Holy Ghost, *to him that is alone; for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up* (Eccles. iv. 10). If a secular forsake the path of virtue, he seldom finds a friend to admonish and correct him, and therefore he easily remains in his fallen state; but in Religion, *if one falls he shall be supported by the other* (Ibid.). If a Religious commits a fault, his companions assist him to correct and repair it. "He," says St. Thomas, "is assisted by his companions to rise again."

III. INCEDIT CAUTIOUS-A RELIGIOUS WALKS MORE CAUTIOUSLY.

How much greater are the spiritual advantages enjoyed by

Religious than those of the first princes or monarchs of the earth. Kings, indeed, abound in riches, honours, and pleasures; they have soldiers and lords to serve them, but they have no one who will dare to correct their faults, or to point out their duties. All abstain from alluding to their defects, through fear of incurring their displeasure; and to secure their esteem many even go so far as to applaud their vices. But, should a Religious go astray, he has many eyes upon him to correct him. His superiors and companions in Religion will not fail to admonish him and to point out his danger; and even the good example of his brother will remind him continually of the transgression into which he has fallen. Surely a Christian, who believes that *eternal life is the one thing necessary*, should set a higher value upon these helps to salvation than upon all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth.

As the world presents to seculars innumerable obstacles to virtue, so the cloister holds out to Religious continual preventatives against sin. In Religion the great care which is taken to prevent light faults is a strong bulwark against the commission of grievous transgressions. If a Religious resists temptations to venial sin, he merits by that resistance additional strength to conquer temptations to mortal sin; but if, through frailty, he sometimes yields to them, all is not lost-the evil is easily repaired. Even then the enemy does not get possession of his soul; at most he only succeeds in taking some unimportant outpost, from which he may be easily driven; while, by such defects, the Religious is taught the necessity of greater vigilance and of stronger defences against future attacks. He is convinced of his own weakness, and being humbled and rendered diffident of his own strength, he recurs more frequently and with more confidence to Jesus Christ and His holy Mother. Thus, from these falls, the Religious sustains no injury, since, as soon as he is humbled before the Lord, God stretches forth His all-powerful arm to raise him up. *When he shall fall he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth his hand under him* (Ps. xxxvi. 24). Such victories over his weakness contribute in some way to inspire greater diffidence in himself, and greater confidence in God. Blessed Egidius, of the Order of St. Francis, used to say that one degree of grace in Religion is better than ten in the world; because in Religion it is easy to

profit by grace, and hard to lose it; while in the world, grace fructifies with difficulty, and is easily lost.

Evening Meditation

JESUS IN SWATHING-BANDS

I.

Imagine that you see Mary, having now brought forth her Son, take Him reverently in her arms, adore Him as her God, and then wrap Him up in swathing-bands: *she wrapped him up in swaddling-clothes* (Luke ii. 7). The Holy Church says the same: "His tender limbs in swathing-bands the Virgin Mother binds." Behold the Infant Jesus, Who obediently offers His little hands and feet, and allows Himself to be swathed. Consider how every time the Holy Infant allowed Himself to be swathed He thought of the cords with which He would one day be led captive in the Garden, and of those also which would bind Him to the pillar, and of the nails which would fasten Him to the Cross; and, thinking of these things, He willingly allowed Himself to be bound, in order to deliver our souls from the chains of hell. Bound, then, in these swaddling-clothes, and turning to us, Jesus invites us to unite ourselves closely to Him with the sweet bonds of love. And turning to His Eternal Father, He says: My Father, men have abused their liberty, and, rebelling against Thee, have made themselves the slaves of sin; but I, to make satisfaction for their disobedience, am willing to be bound and confined in swathing bands. Bound with these, I offer Thee my liberty, in order that man may be delivered from the slavery of the devil. I accept these bands; they are dear to Me, because they represent the cords with which, from this moment, I offer Myself to be one day bound and led to death for the salvation of men.

And what fear can I have of Thy chastisements, O my beloved Infant, now that I see Thee in these swathing-bands, depriving Thyself, so to say, of the power of raising Thy hand to punish me? Thou dost give me to understand by these bands that Thou wilt not chastise me, if I will loose myself from the chains of my vices, and bind myself to Thee. Yes, my Jesus, I resolve to free myself. I repent with all my heart of having separated myself from Thee, by abusing that liberty which Thou hast

given me. Thou dost offer me another and a nobler liberty; a liberty which delivers me from the chains of the devil, and places me among the children of God.

II.

His bands are a healthful binding (Ecclus. vi. 31). The bands of Jesus were the healthful binding to heal the wounds of our souls. Therefore, O my Jesus, Thou didst will to be wrapped in swathing-bands for the love of me. "O Love, how great is thy bond, which could bind a God!" O Divine Love, Thou alone couldst make my God Thy Prisoner. And shall I then, O Lord, refuse to have myself bound by Thy holy love? Shall I for the future, be so unfaithful as to loose myself from Thy sweet and amiable chains? And for what? To make myself a slave of hell? O my Lord, Thou remainest bound in this manger for the love of me; I desire always to remain bound to Thee. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that the bands which we ought to take are a firm resolution of uniting ourselves closely to God by means of love; detaching ourselves at the same time from all affection for any thing that is not God. For this reason also it seems that our loving Jesus has allowed Himself to be, as it were, bound and a Prisoner in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, under the sacramental species, that He might see His beloved souls made also prisoners of His love.

Thou hast given Thyself up to be imprisoned in these bands for the love of me; I will be a prisoner of Thy immense love. O blessed chains, O beautiful emblems of salvation, which unite souls to God, bind also my poor heart! But bind it so fast, that it may never in future be able to disengage itself from the love of this sovereign Good. My Jesus, I love Thee; I bind myself to Thee; I give Thee my whole heart, my whole will. No, I will never leave Thee again, my beloved Lord. O my Saviour, Who, to pay my debts, didst will not only to be wrapped by Mary in swathing-bands, but even to be bound as a criminal by the executioners, and thus bound, go through the streets of Jerusalem, to be led to death as an innocent lamb to slaughter; O Thou Who didst will to be nailed to the Cross, and didst not come down from it until Thou hadst given up Thy life upon it -- permit me not, I beseech Thee, ever to separate myself again

from Thee, so as to see myself once more deprived of Thy grace and of Thy love. O Mary, who didst bind in swathing-bands this Thy innocent Son, bind me also, a miserable sinner, I pray thee; bind me to Jesus, so that I may never again leave His feet; that bound to Him I may always live and die thus bound, in order that I may have the happiness to enter into that blessed country, where I shall no longer have the power, and no longer the fear, of separating myself from His holy love.

Feast of the Holy Innocents

(December 28th)

Morning Meditation

GOD HAS MADE HIMSELF OURS.

Tell me, cruel Herod, why dost thou command so many innocent babes to be murdered and sacrificed to thy ambition of reigning? Art thou perchance afraid that the Messias just born may rob thee of thy kingdom? This King Who is now born has come, not to vanquish by fighting, but to subdue the hearts of men by suffering and dying for their love.

I.

The cruel Herod commanded the innocent babes to be murdered, and sacrificed to his ambition, afraid, perchance, that the new-born Messias would rob him of his kingdom. "Why art thou so troubled, Herod?" asks St. Fulgentius. "This King Who is born has come, not to vanquish kings by fighting, but to subdue them by dying." This King is come to reign in the hearts of men by suffering and dying for their love. "He has come," continues the Saint, "not, therefore, that He might combat alive, but that He might triumph slain." Leave Herod aside, O devout souls, and let us come to ourselves. Why, then, did the Son of God come upon earth? Was it to give Himself to us? Yes. Isaiah assures us of it: *A child is born to us and a son is given to us.* The love which this loving Saviour bears us, and the desire which He has to be loved by us has induced Him to do this. Being His own He has become ours! This God over Whom none can rule, has, so to speak, yielded Himself Captive to love. Love has gained the victory over Him, and, from being His own, has placed Him in our possession. "He is born Who belonged to Himself," says St.

Bernard. He Who appertained wholly to Himself chose to be born for us and to become ours; love triumphs over God! God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son! And behold Him already arrived from Heaven in a stable, as a Child -- born for us and given to us. *A child is born to us and a son is given to us* (Is. xi. 6). This is precisely what the Angel signified when addressing the shepherds: *Today is born to you a Saviour* (Luke ii. 11). As much as to say: O ye men, go to the Cave of Bethlehem; there adore the Infant Whom you will find lying in the straw in a manger and shivering with cold. Know that He is your God, Who would not consent to send any one else to save you, but would come Himself that He might gain for Himself all your love.

Oh, my beloved Infant, my dear Redeemer, since Thou hast come down from Heaven to give Thyself to me what else shall I care to seek in Heaven or on earth besides Thee? Be Thou the sole Lord of my heart; do Thou possess it wholly. May my soul love Thee alone and seek to please Thee alone!

II.

In divers ways had God already striven to win the hearts of men: at one time with benefits, at another, with threats, and again with promises; but He had still fallen short of His aim. His infinite love, says St. Augustine, made Him devise the plan of giving Himself entirely to us by the Incarnation of the Word, in order thus to oblige us to love Him with our whole hearts. "Then Love found out the plan of delivering up Itself!" He could have sent an Angel, a Seraph, to redeem man. But aware that man, had he been redeemed by a Seraph, would have to divide his heart by partly loving his Creator, and partly loving this redeemer, God, Who wished to possess the entire heart and the entire love of man, "wished therefore to be," as says a pious author, "both our Creator and Redeemer Himself."

And not only has Jesus Christ given Himself to all men in general, but He has wished, moreover, to give Himself to each one in particular. This it was caused St. Paul to say: *He loved me and delivered Himself for me* (Gal. ii. 20). So that, dear child of God, if there had been no others in the world beside yourself, the Redeemer would have come for the sake of you alone, and would have given His Blood and His life for you.

My God, my Beloved, has given Himself all to me; it is but reasonable for me to give myself all to my God. Let others strive after and enjoy, if enjoyment can ever be found apart from Thee, the goods and fortunes of this world. Thee alone do I desire, Who art my fortune, my riches, my peace, my hope in this life and in eternity. Behold, then, my heart, I give it wholly to Thee. It is no longer mine own, but Thine.

O happy thou, most holy Virgin Mary; thou wert wholly and always God's own -- all fair, all pure and without spot. I have not belonged to God in the past, but now I wish to be His, and to be His entirely. O my hope, obtain me strength to be grateful and faithful to Him till death! Amen. This is my hope. So may it be.

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

V. IRRORATUR FREQUENTIU-A RELIGIOUS IS BEDEWEED MORE FREQUENTLY.

O God, with what interior light, with what spiritual delights and sweetness of love does not Jesus refresh the good Religious at prayer or Communion, or in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or in the cell before the Crucifix! Christians in the world are like plants in a barren land, on which little of the dew of Heaven falls, and from that little the soil, for want of proper cultivation, seldom derives fertility. Poor seculars! they desire to devote more time to prayer, to receive the Holy Eucharist, and to hear the word of God more frequently; they long for a little solitude, to be more recollected and more closely united to God. But temporal affairs, human ties, visits of friends, the restraints of the world, place these means of sanctification almost beyond their reach. Religious are, on the contrary, like trees planted in a fruitful soil, which is continually and abundantly watered by the dews of Heaven. In the cloister the Lord continually comforts and animates His faithful servants by infusing interior lights and consolations during the time of meditation, sermons, and spiritual reading, and by means of the good example of their companions. Well, then, might Mother Catherine of Jesus, of the Holy Order of St. Teresa, say, when reminded of the labours she had endured in the foundation of a convent: "God has rewarded me

abundantly by permitting me to spend one hour as a Religious in the house of His holy Mother."

VI. QUIESCIT SECURIUS-A RELIGIOUS RESTS MORE SECURELY.

Worldly goods can never satisfy the cravings of the human soul. The brute creation, being destined only for this world, is content with the goods of the earth; but, being made for God, man can never enjoy happiness except in the possession of God. The experience of ages proves this truth; for if the goods of this life could content the heart of man, kings and princes who abound in riches, honours, and pleasures of the senses, would have days of perfect bliss. But history and experience attest that they are the most unhappy and discontented of men, and that riches and dignities are always the fertile source of fears, of troubles, and of bitterness. The Emperor Theodosius entered one day, unknown, into the cell of a solitary, and after some conversation, said: "Father, do you know who I am? I am the Emperor Theodosius." He then added: "Oh, how happy are you, who lead here on earth a life of contentment, free from the cares and woes of the world. I am a sovereign of the earth, but, be assured, Father, that I never dine in peace."

But how can the world, a place of treachery, of jealousies, of fears and tumult, give peace to man? In the world, indeed, there are certain wretched pleasures which afflict rather than content the soul; which delight the senses for a moment, but leave lasting anguish and remorse behind. Hence the more exalted and honourable the rank and station a man holds in the world, the greater is his uneasiness and discontent; for earthly dignities, in proportion to their greatness, are accompanied with cares and contradictions. We may, then, conclude that the world, in which the heart-rending passions of ambition, avarice, and the love of pleasure, exercise a cruel tyranny over the heart, must be a place, not of ease and happiness, but of inquietude and torture. Its goods can never be possessed to the full extent of our wishes; and when enjoyed, instead of bringing peace to the soul, they fill it with bitterness. Hence, whosoever is satisfied with earthly goods, is saturated with wormwood and poison.

Happy, then, the Religious who loves God, and recognises

the favour bestowed on him in being called from the world and being placed in Religion, where, conquering by holy mortification his rebellious passions, and practising continued self-denial, he enjoys that peace, which, according to the Apostle, exceeds all the delights of sensual gratification. *The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7). Find me, if you can, among those seculars on whom fortune has lavished her Choicest gifts, or even among the first princes or kings of the earth, a soul more happy or content than a Religious divested of every worldly affection, and intent only on pleasing God. He is not rendered unhappy by poverty, for he preferred it to all the riches of the earth -- he has voluntarily chosen it, and rejoices in its privations; nor by the mortification of the senses, for he entered Religion to die to the world and to himself; nor by the restraints of obedience, for he knows that the renunciation of self-will is the most acceptable sacrifice he could offer to God. He is not afflicted at his humiliation, because it was to be despised that he came into the house of God. *I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the tabernacle of sinners* (Ps. lxxxiii.

11). Retirement is to him rather a source of consolation than of sorrow; because it frees him from the cares and dangers of the world. To serve the Community, to be treated with contempt, or, to be afflicted with infirmities, does not trouble the tranquility of his soul, because he knows that all this makes him more dear to Jesus Christ. Finally, the observance of his Rule does not trouble a Religious, because the labours and burdens which it imposes, if heavy, are only the weight of wings which are necessary to fly to and be united with his God. Oh! how happy and delightful is the state of a Religious, whose heart is not divided, and who can say with St. Francis: "My God and my All!"

Evening Meditation

JESUS TAKING MILK

I.

As soon as Jesus was swathed, He looked for and took milk from the breast of Mary. The Spouse in the Canticles desired to see her little brother taking milk from his mother: *Who shall give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother* (Cant. vii. 1). This Spouse desired, but did not see Him; but we are

they who have had the happiness of seeing the Son of God made Man, and become our Brother, taking milk at the breast of Mary. Oh, what a spectacle must it not have been to Paradise to see the Divine Word become an Infant, sucking milk from a Virgin who was His own creature! He, then, Who feeds all men and all animals upon the earth, is become so weak and so poor, that He requires a little milk to sustain His life! Sister Paula, the Camaldolese, in contemplating a little image of Jesus taking milk, felt herself at once inflamed with a tender love for God. Jesus took but little of this milk, and took it but seldom in the day. It was revealed to Sister Mary Anne, a Franciscan, that Mary only gave Him milk three times in the day. O milk most precious to us, to be changed into blood in the veins of Jesus Christ, and afterwards to be made by Him a bath of salvation in which to cleanse our souls!

O my sweet and most amiable Infant, Thou art the Bread of Heaven which sustains the Angels; Thou dost provide all creatures with food; and yet how art Thou reduced to the necessity of begging a little milk to preserve Thy life! O Divine Love, how hast Thou been able to make a God so poor as to be in want of a little food? But I now understand Thee, O my Jesus; Thou didst take milk from Mary in this Cave, to offer it afterwards to God changed into blood, as a sacrifice on the Cross, and in satisfaction for our sins. Give, O Mary, give all the milk thou canst to this Son, because every drop has to serve to wash away the sins from my soul, and to nourish it afterwards in Holy Communion.

II.

Let us consider also that Jesus took milk in order to nourish the Body which He wished to leave us as food in the Holy Communion. Therefore, my little Redeemer, whilst Thou dost take milk, Thou art thinking of me; Thou art thinking of changing this milk into blood, to be shed afterwards at Thy death, and with that price ransom my soul, and feed it in the Most Holy Sacrament which is the saving milk with which Thou preservest our souls in the life of grace: "Christ is your milk," says St. Augustine. O beloved Infant, O my Jesus, let me also exclaim with the woman in the Gospel: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck* (Luke xi. 27). Blessed art thou, O Mother

of God, who hadst the happiness to give milk to the Incarnate Word! Oh, permit me, in company with thy divine Son, to take from thee the milk of a tender and loving devotion to the infancy of Jesus and to thyself, my dearest Mother. And I thank Thee, O Divine Infant, Who didst allow Thyself to be in need of milk, in order to prove to me the great love Thou bearest me. It is precisely this that our Lord gave St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to understand—that He had reduced Himself to the necessity of taking milk, in order to make us comprehend the love that He has for redeemed souls.

O my Redeemer, how can anyone who believes what Thou hast done and suffered to save us, refuse to love Thee? And I, how could I know this, and yet be so ungrateful to Thee? But Thy goodness is my hope; and this makes me know that if I wish for Thy grace, it is mine. I repent, O sovereign Good, of having offended Thee, and I love Thee above everything. Or rather, I love nothing; I love and will love Thee alone; Thou art, and shalt always be, my only Good, my only Love. My dear Redeemer, give me, I pray Thee, a tender devotion to Thy holy Infancy, such as Thou hast given to so many souls, who, meditating on Thee as an Infant, and forgetting all else, seem unable to think of anything but of loving Thee. It is true that they are innocent, and I am a sinner; but Thou didst become a Child to make Thyself loved even by sinners. I have been such; but now I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire nothing but Thy love. O Mary, give me a little of that tender love with which thou didst give milk to the Infant Jesus.

December the Twenty-Ninth

Morning Meditation

"THE CHOSEN ARROW"

He hath made me a chosen arrow; in his quiver he hath hidden me
(Is. xlix. 2).

Cardinal Hugo remarks that as the hunter keeps in reserve the best arrow for the last shot in order to make sure of his prey, "so was Jesus Christ reserved in the bosom of His Father until the fulness of time should come, and He was sent to wound the hearts of the faithful."

I.

St. Augustine says that God, in order to captivate the love of men, has cast several darts of love into their hearts. "God knows how to discharge His arrows at love: He sends the arrow that He may make a lover." What are these arrows? They are all the creatures that we see around us; for God has created them all for man, that man may love Him; hence the same Saint says: "Heaven and earth and all things tell me to love Thee." It seemed to the Saint that the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the plains, the seas and the rivers, spoke to him and said: *Augustine, love God, because God has created us for thee that thou mightest love Him.* When St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi held in her hand a beautiful fruit or flower, she declared that the fruit or flower was a dart to her heart which wounded her with the love of God. St. Teresa said that all the fair things we see, the lakes, the rivers, the flowers, the fruits, the birds -- all upbraid us with our ingratitude to God, for all are tokens of the love He bears us. It is related of a pious hermit that, walking in the country, he fancied the herbs and flowers reproached him with his ingratitude; so that as he went along he struck them gently with his staff, saying to them: "Be silent! I understand you! No more! You upbraid me with my ingratitude, for God has created you in such beauty for my sake, that I may love Him, and I love Him not! Oh, be silent, I understand! Enough! Enough!"

Thus then, all these creatures were so many darts of love to the hearts of men. But God was not satisfied with these darts only; they were not enough to gain Him the love of men. *He hath made me a chosen arrow; in his quiver he hath hidden me.* So, among all His gifts, did God keep Jesus in reserve till the fulness of time should come, and then He sent Him as a last Arrow to wound with love the hearts of men. *Thy arrows are sharp; under thee people shall fall* (Ps. xlv. 6). Ah, how many wounded hearts do I behold burning with love before the manger of Bethlehem! How many at the foot of the Cross of Calvary! How many before the Holy Presence of the Blessed Sacrament on our altars!

Ah, my Lord, tell me, is there anything else left for Thee to devise in order to make Thyself loved? Make His inventions known among the people, as Isaias cried out. O Redeemed

souls, go and publish everywhere the loving devices of this loving God which He has thought out and executed to make Himself loved, by men!

II.

St. Peter Chrysologus says our Redeemer took many various forms to attract the love of men. "For our sake He showed Himself under different forms Who remains in the form of His majesty." The unchangeable God would appear now as a Child in a stable, now as a Boy in the workshop, now as Criminal on a scaffold, and now as Bread on the Altar! In these varying figures Jesus chose to exhibit Himself to us; but whatever the character He assumed, it was always the character of a Lover.

Oh, how God longs to see, and how dearly He loves, a heart that is wholly His! Ah, what delicate and loving caresses does He not bestow; what good things, what delights, what glory does God not prepare in Paradise for a heart that is wholly His! The Venerable Father John Leonard de Lettera, a Dominican, one day beheld Jesus Christ under the appearance of a hunter traversing the forest of this earth with an arrow in His hand. The servant of God asked Him wherefore He was thus engaged. Jesus answered that He was seeking after hearts. Who knows whether now in these days the Infant Redeemer will have the success to hit and make a prize of some hearts after which He has been pursuing for a long time, and hitherto has been unable to wound and capture!

Devout souls, if Jesus gains us, we shall also gain Jesus. The advantage of such an exchange is all on our side. "Teresa!" said the Lord one day to this Saint, "up to this time, you have not been all Mine. Now that you are all Mine, be assured that I am all yours." Love is the bond which binds the Lover with the loved one, says St. Augustine. God has every wish to embrace us and unite us to Himself, but it is also necessary for us to strive and unite ourselves to God.

My dear Jesus, inflame me with Thy holy love, since for this end Thou didst come upon the earth. Lord, I have hitherto been ungrateful and blind. Now that I see Thee trembling with cold on the straw, crying and weeping for me - O my Infant God, how can I live without loving Thee! O Mary, great Mother of

this great Son, and most beloved by Him, pray to Him for me.

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

VI. A RELIGIOUS RESTS MORE SECURELY (continued).

It is true that, even in the cloister, there are some discontented souls; and why, I ask? Because they do not live as Religious ought to live. To be a good Religious, and to be content, are one and the same thing. Of necessity, therefore, does the happiness of a Religious consist in a constant and perfect union of his will with the will of God. Whosoever is not thus united with Him cannot be happy; for God will not infuse His consolations into a soul that resists His holy will. Hence, I am accustomed to say, that a Religious in the cloister enjoys a foretaste of Paradise, or suffers an anticipation of hell. For what is hell? It is to be separated from God, to be forced against the inclinations of nature, to do the will of others, to be distrusted, despised, reprov'd, chastised, to be in a place out of which there is no escape -- in a word, it is to be in continual torture without a single moment's peace. Such is the miserable condition of a bad Religious; and therefore he suffers on earth an anticipation of the torments of hell. On the other hand, what is Paradise? The happiness of Paradise consists in freedom from the cares and afflictions of the world; in conversation with the Saints; in a perfect union with God, and in the enjoyment of continual peace. A perfect Religious possesses all these blessings, and therefore receives in this life a foretaste of Paradise.

It is, indeed, true that fervent Religious have their crosses to carry here below, for this life is a state of merit, and consequently of suffering. The inconveniences of common life are burdensome; the reproofs of superiors, and the refusal of permissions galling; the mortification of the senses painful; self-love complains at the contradiction and contempt one meets with. But to a Religious who desires to belong entirely to God, all these occasions of suffering are so many sources of consolation and delight; for he knows that by embracing pain, he offers a sweet odour to God. St. Bonaventure says that the love of God is like honey, which sweetens every bitter. The Venerable Cae-

sar de Bustis addressed a nephew who had entered Religion in the following words: "My dear nephew, when you look up at the heavens think of Paradise; when you see the world, reflect on hell, where the damned endure eternal torments without a moment's enjoyment; when you behold your monastery, remember purgatory, where many just souls suffer in peace and with a certainty of eternal life." And what more delightful than to suffer -- if suffering it can be called -- with a tranquil conscience, to suffer for Jesus, and with an assurance that one day every pain will become a gem in an everlasting crown? Ah! the brightest jewels in the diadems of the Saints are the sufferings which they endured in this life with patience and resignation.

God is faithful to His promises, and bountiful beyond measure. He knows how to remunerate His servants, even in this life, by interior sweetness, for the pains which they patiently suffer for His sake. Experience shows that Religious who seek consolation and happiness from creatures are always discontented, whilst they who practise the greatest mortifications enjoy continual peace. Let us, then, be persuaded that neither pleasures of sense, nor honours, nor riches, nor the world with all its goods, can make us happy. God alone can content the heart of man. Whoever finds Him, possesses all things. Hence St. Scholastica says, that if men knew the peace, which Religious enjoy in retirement, the entire world would become one great convent; and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that men would abandon the delight of the world, and force their way into Religion. Hence St. Laurence Justinian says that "God has designedly concealed the happiness of the Religious state, because if it were known, all would relinquish the world and fly into Religion."

The very solitude, silence and tranquility of the cloister gives to the soul that loves God a foretaste of Paradise. Father Charles of Lorraine, a Jesuit of royal extraction, used to say that the peace which he enjoyed during a single moment in his cell repaid him well for the sacrifice he had made in quitting the world. Such was the happiness which he sometimes experienced in his cell, that he would dance for very joy. Arnolf, a Cistercian, comparing the riches and honours of the court which he had left, with the consolations which he found in Religion, exclaimed: "O

Jesus, true indeed is Thy promise, offering a hundred-fold to him who leaves all things for Thy sake!" St. Bernard's monks, who led lives of great penance and austerities, received in their solitude such spiritual delights, that they were afraid they should obtain in this life the reward of their labours. Let it be your care to unite yourself closely to God; to embrace with peace the crosses He sends you; to love what is most perfect; and, when necessary, to do violence to yourself. But to have the necessary strength you must pray continually; pray in your meditations, in your Communions, in your Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and especially when you are tempted by the devil; thus you will be amongst those fervent souls who are more happy and content than all the princes and kings and emperors of the earth.

Beg of God to give you the spirit of a perfect Religious; that spirit which impels the soul to act, not according to the dictates of nature, but according to the inspirations of grace, or from the sole motive of pleasing God. This is to be a true Religious. What use is it to wear the habit of a Religious if in heart and soul you be a secular, and live according to the maxims of the world? Whosoever profanes the garb of Religion by a worldly spirit and a worldly life, has an apostate heart. "To maintain," says St. Bernard, "a secular spirit under the habit of Religion is apostacy of heart." The spirit of a Religious requires an exact obedience to the Rules, and to the orders of the superiors, together with great zeal for the interests of Religion. There are some who wish to become Saints, but only according to their own caprice; that is, by long silence, prayer, and spiritual reading, without taking part in any of the offices of the Community. Hence, if they are appointed porters, or given any occupations that keep them from their devotions, they become impatient, complain, and sometimes obstinately refuse to obey, saying that such offices are to them occasions of sin. Oh! such is not the spirit of a Religious; surely what is conformable to the will of God cannot hurt the soul. The Religious spirit requires a total detachment from the world, great love of prayer, silence, and recollection, an ardent zeal for exact observance, a deep abhorrence of sensual indulgence, intense charity towards all men, and finally, a love of God capable of subduing and ruling all the passions. Such is the spirit of a per-

fect Religious. Whosoever does not possess this spirit, should, at least desire it and earnestly beg God's assistance to obtain it. In a word, the spirit of a Religious supposes a total disengagement of the heart from everything which is not God, and a perfect consecration of the soul to Him, and to Him alone.

Evening Meditation

JESUS LYING ON STRAW

I.

Jesus is born in the stable of Bethlehem. His poor Mother has neither wool nor down to make a bed for the tender Infant. What does she do, then? She gathers together a handful of straw into the manger, and puts Him to lie upon it: *And she laid him in the manger* (Luke ii. 7). But, O my God, how hard and painful is this bed for an infant just born; the limbs of a babe are so delicate, and especially the limbs of Jesus, which were formed by the Holy Spirit with a special delicacy, in order that they might be the more sensible to suffering. *A body thou hast fitted to me* (Heb. x., 5).

Wherefore the hardness of such a bed must have caused Him excessive pain-pain and shame; for what child, even of the lowest of the people, is ever laid on straw as soon as he is born? Straw is a bed fit only for beasts; and yet the Son of God had none other on earth than a bed of miserable straw! St. Francis of Assisi, one day, as he sat at table, heard these words of the Gospel: *And laid him in a manger*; and he exclaimed: "What? My Lord was laid on the straw, and shall I continue to sit?" And so he arose from his seat, threw himself on the ground, and there finished his scanty meal, mingling with it tears of tenderness as he contemplated the sufferings that the Infant Jesus endured whilst He lay on the straw.

O Lover of souls, O my loving Redeemer! is not, then, the sorrowful Passion that awaits Thee, and the bitter death that is prepared for Thee on the Cross, sufficient, but that Thou must, even from the commencement of Thy life, even from Thy Infancy, begin to suffer? Yes, because even as an Infant Thou wouldst begin to be my Redeemer, and to satisfy the divine justice for my sins. Thou didst choose a bed of straw to deliver me from the fire of hell, into which I have so many times deserved to be cast.

Thou didst cry and mourn on this bed of straw to obtain for me pardon from Thy Father. Oh, how these Thy tears afflict me, and yet console me! They afflict me from compassion at seeing Thee, an innocent Babe, suffering so much for sins not Thy own; they console me, because Thy sufferings assure me of my salvation, and of Thy immense love for me.

II.

But why did Mary, who had so earnestly desired the birth of this Son -- why did she, who loved Him so much, allow Him to lie and suffer on this hard bed, instead of keeping Him in her arms? This is a mystery, says St. Thomas of Villanova: "Nor would she have laid Him in such a place, unless there had been some great mystery in it." This great mystery has been explained by many in different ways, but the explanation most pleasing to me is that of St. Peter Damian: Jesus wished as soon as He was born to be placed on the straw, in order to teach us the mortification of our senses: "He laid down the law of martyrdom." The world had been lost by sensual pleasures. From the time of Adam multitudes of his descendants had thus been lost. The Eternal Word came from Heaven to teach us the love of suffering; and He began as a Child to teach it by choosing for Himself the most acute sufferings that an infant could endure. It was, therefore, He Himself Who inspired His Mother to cease from holding Him in her tender arms, and to place Him on the hard bed, that He might the more feel the cold of the cave and the pricking of the rough straw.

But, my Jesus, I will not leave Thee alone to cry and to suffer. I also will weep; for I alone deserve to shed tears on account of the offences I have committed against Thee. I, who have deserved hell, will not refuse any suffering whatever, so that I may regain Thy favour, O my Saviour. Forgive me, I beseech Thee; receive me once more into Thy friendship, make me love Thee, and then chastise me as Thou wilt. Deliver me from eternal punishment, and then treat me as it shall please Thee. I do not seek the pleasures of this life; he does not deserve pleasure who has had the temerity to offend Thee, O infinite Goodness. I am content to suffer all the crosses Thou shalt send me; but, my Jesus, I will love Thee still. O Mary, who didst sympathise

by thy sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus, obtain for me the grace to suffer all my trials with patience. Woe to me, if, after so many sins, I do not suffer something in this life! And blessed shall I be if I have the happiness to accompany thee in thy sufferings, O my sorrowful Mother, and Thee, O my Jesus, always afflicted and crucified for love of me.

December the Thirtieth

Morning Meditation

THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE

All flesh is grass. The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass. Death comes, the grass is dried up. Behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off! *The grass is withered and the flower is fallen!*

I.

What is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while (James iv. 15).

What is your life? It is a vapour, which is dissipated by a blast of wind, and is seen no more. All know that they must die; but the delusion of many is, that they imagine death to be so far off as if it were never to arrive. But Job tells us that the life of man is short. *Man born of woman, living for a short time, ... who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed* (Job xiv. 12). The Lord commanded Isaias to preach this truth to the people. *Cry ... All flesh is grass. ... Indeed, the people is grass. The grass is withered and the flower is fallen* (Is. xl. 6 sqq.). The life of man may be likened to that of a blade of grass; death comes, the grass is dried up: behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off.

My days, says Job, have been swifter than a post (Job ix. 25). Death runs to meet us most swiftly and we at every moment run as swiftly towards death. Every step, every breath brings us nearer to our end. "What I write," says St. Jerome, "is so much taken away from life." During the time I write, I draw nearer to death. *We all die, and, like the waters that return no more, we fall into the earth* (2 Kings xiv. 14). Behold how the stream flows to the sea, and the passing waters never return! Thus, my brother, your days go by, and you approach death. Pleasures, amusements, pomps, praises and acclamations pass away; *and only the grave*

remaineth for me (Job xvii. 1). At the hour of death the remembrance of the delights enjoyed, and of all the honours acquired in this life, will serve only to increase our pain and our diffidence of obtaining eternal salvation. Then the miserable worldling will say: "My house, my gardens, my fashionable furniture, my pictures, my garments, will in a little time be no longer mine, *and only the grave remaineth for me.*"

Ah, my God and Lord of infinite majesty! I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I dishonoured Thee by preferring a sordid pleasure, the indulgence of anger, caprice, or vanity, to Thy grace? O my Redeemer, I adore and kiss Thy holy Wounds, which I have inflicted by my sins; but through which I hope for pardon and salvation. O my Jesus, make me understand the great injury I have done Thee in leaving Thee, the Fountain of every good, to drink putrid and poisoned waters. Nothing now remains but pain, remorse of conscience, and fruits for hell. *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy child* (Luke xv. 21). My Father! do not cast me off. It is true that I no longer merit the grace which would make Me Thy child; but Thou hast said: *Turn ye to me, ... and I will turn to you* (Zach. i. 3). I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life, and I wish to love nothing but Thee. Assist me; give me holy perseverance, and Thy holy love. Mary, my refuge, plead with Jesus Christ for me.

II.

How great is the folly of those who, for the miserable and transitory delights of this short life, expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, and afterwards of an unhappy eternity. Oh! how important is that last moment, that last gasp, that last closing scene! On it depends an eternity either of all delights or of all torments -- a life of eternal happiness or of everlasting woe. Let us consider that Jesus Christ submitted to a cruel and ignominious death in order to obtain for us the grace of a good death. That we may at that last moment die in the grace of God is the reason why He gives us so many calls, so many lights, and admonishes us by so many threats.

If there were two tickets in a lottery, on one of which was written *Hell* and on the other *Heaven*, what care would you not take to draw that which would give you a right to Paradise, and

to avoid the other, by which you would be condemned to a place in hell! O God! how the hands of those unhappy men tremble who are condemned to throw the die on which life or death depends! How great will be your terror at the approach of that last hour, when you will say: On this moment depends my life or death for eternity; on this depends whether I shall be forever happy or forever in despair! St. Berardine of Sienna relates, that at death a certain prince exclaimed, with trembling and dismay: Behold, I have so many kingdoms and palaces in this world; but if I die this night I know not what apartment shall be assigned to me in the next.

Brother, if you believe that you must die, that there is an eternity, that you can die only once, and that if you then err, your error will be forever irreparable, why do you not resolve to begin at this moment to do all in your power to secure a good death? St. Andrew Avellino said with trembling: "Who knows what will be my lot in the next life? Shall I be saved or damned?" Oh! hasten to apply a remedy in time; resolve to give yourself sincerely to God, and begin from this moment a life which, at the hour of death, will be to you a source, not of affliction, but of consolation. Give yourself up to prayer, frequent the Sacraments, avoid all dangerous occasions, and, if necessary, leave the world, secure to yourself eternal salvation, and be persuaded that to secure eternal life no precaution can be too great.

O my dear Saviour, how great are my obligations to Thee! How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on so ungrateful a traitor as I have been? Thou didst create me; and in creating me Thou didst see the injuries which I would commit against Thee. Thou didst redeem me by dying for me: and then, too, Thou didst see the ingratitude which I would be guilty of towards Thee. Being placed in the world I turned my back upon Thee by my sins. My soul was dead and Thou didst restore me to life. I was blind, and Thou didst enlighten me. I had lost Thee, and Thou didst enable me to find Thee. I was Thy enemy, and Thou didst make me Thy friend. O God of mercy, make me feel the obligations which I owe Thee, and make me weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee. O Eternal Father, I abhor and detest, above all evils, the injuries I have

done Thee. Have mercy on me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Look at Thy Son dead on the Cross. *Sanguis ejus super me*. May His Blood flow upon me and wash my soul! Mary, my Queen and Mother, assist me by thy intercession. Mother of God, pray for me.

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

VII. MORITUR CONFIDENTIUS -- A RELIGIOUS DIES MORE CONFIDENTLY.

Some are deterred from entering Religion by the apprehension that their abandonment of the world may be afterwards to them a source of regret. In making choice of a state of life, I would advise such persons to reflect, not on the time given to us to live, but on the hour of death, which will determine their happiness or misery for all eternity. And I would ask if in the world, surrounded by seculars, disturbed by the fondness of children, from whom they are about to be separated, perplexed with the care of their worldly affairs, and troubled by a thousand scruples of conscience, they can expect to die more content than in the House of God, assisted by their holy companions, who continually speak to them of God, pray for them, console and encourage them in their passage to eternity? Imagine you see, on the one hand, a prince dying in a splendid palace, attended by a retinue of servants, surrounded by his wife, his children, and relations, and represent to yourself, on the other, a Religious expiring in his monastery, in a poor cell, mortified, humble, far from his relatives, stripped of property and self-will; and tell me, which of the two dies more contented -- that sick prince or that poor Religious? Ah! the enjoyment of riches, honours and pleasures of this life does not afford consolation at the hour of death, but rather begets grief and diffidence of salvation; while poverty, humiliations, penitential austerities, and detachment from the world, render death sweet, and give to a Christian increased hopes of attaining that true felicity which shall never terminate.

Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever leaves his home and relatives for His love shall enjoy eternal life. *And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold*

and possess life everlasting (Matt. xix. 29). A certain Religious of the Society of Jesus, being observed to smile on his death-bed, some of his brethren began to apprehend that he was not aware of his danger, and asked him why he smiled; he answered: "Why should I not smile, since I am sure of Paradise? Has not the Lord Himself promised to give eternal life to those who leave the world for His sake? I have long since abandoned all things for the love of Him; His promise cannot fail. I smile, then, because I confidently expect eternal glory." The same sentiment was expressed long before by St. John Chrysostom, writing to a certain Religious: "God cannot tell a lie; and He has promised eternal life to those who leave the goods of this world. You have left all these things; why, then, should you doubt the fulfilment of His promise?"

St. Bernard says that "it is very easy to pass from the cell to Heaven; because a person who dies in a cell scarcely ever descends into hell, since it seldom happens that a Religious perseveres in his cell till death unless he be predestined to eternal happiness." St. Laurence Justinian says that Religion is the gate of Paradise; because, living in Religion, and partaking of its advantages, is a great mark of election to glory. No wonder, then, that Gerard, the brother of St. Bernard, when dying in his monastery, died singing. God Himself says: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord* (Apoc. xiv. 13). And surely Religious, who, by the holy vows, and especially by the vow of obedience, or total renunciation of self-will, die to the world and to themselves, must be amongst those who *die in the Lord*. Father Suarez, remembering at the hour of death that all his actions in Religion were performed through obedience, was filled with spiritual joy, and exclaimed that he could not have imagined death could be so sweet and so full of consolation.

VIII. PURGATUR CITIUS -- A RELIGIOUS IS PURIFIED MORE QUICKLY.

St. Thomas teaches that the perfect consecration which a Religious makes of himself to God, by his solemn Profession remits the guilt and punishment of all his past sins. The Saint writes: "It may be reasonably said that a person by entering Religion, obtains the remission of all his sins. For, to make satisfac-

tion for all sins, it is sufficient to dedicate oneself entirely to the service of God by entering Religion, which dedication exceeds all manner of satisfaction." "Hence," he concludes, "we read in the Lives of the Fathers, that they who enter Religion obtain the same very grace as those who receive Baptism." The defects committed after Profession by a good Religious, are expiated in this world by his daily exercises of piety, meditations, Communion, and mortifications. But, should a Religious not have made full atonement in this life for all his sins, his Purgatory will not be of long duration. The many sacrifices which are offered for him after death, and the prayers of the Community, will soon release him from suffering.

Evening Meditation

JESUS SLEEPING

I.

Very short and painful were the slumbers of the Infant Jesus. A manger was His cradle, straw was His bed, and straw His pillow; so that the sleep of Jesus was often interrupted by the hardness of this rough and painful little bed, and by the severe cold of the cave. Notwithstanding this, overcome by nature, the sweet Babe from time to time slept amidst His sufferings. But the sleep of Jesus differed much from that of other children; the slumbers of other children are useful for the preservation of life, but not for the operations of the soul, because the soul being buried with the senses in sleep, does not then work; but such was not the sleep of Jesus Christ: *I sleep, and my heart watcheth* (Cant. v. 2). His body was asleep, but His soul was watching, because it was united to the Person of the Word, Who could not slumber, nor be lulled to sleep by the senses. The Holy Infant, therefore, slept; but while He slept He thought of all the sufferings He was to endure for our love during His life and at His death. He thought of the fatigues He was to undergo in Egypt and in Nazareth during His poor and despised life. He thought then, in particular, of the scourges, of the thorns, of the ignominies, of the agonies, and of that desolate death that He was at last to suffer upon the Cross; and whilst He was sleeping He offered all this to His Eternal Father to obtain for us pardon and salvation. So that our Saviour, even while sleeping, was meriting for us and

appeasing His Father, and obtaining graces for us.

My beloved and holy Infant, Thou sleepest, and oh, how much do not Thy slumbers enamour me! With others, sleep is the emblem of death; but in Thee it is the sign of eternal life, because whilst Thou art reposing, Thou art meriting for me eternal salvation. Thou sleepest; but Thy Heart sleeps not, it is thinking of Thy suffering and dying for me. Whilst Thou art sleeping Thou art praying for me, and obtaining for me from God the eternal rest of Paradise. But before Thou dost take me to repose with Thee, as I hope, in Heaven, I desire that Thou shouldst repose for ever in my soul.

II.

Let us now beseech the Divine Child, by the merit of His blessed slumbers, to deliver us from the deadly slumber of sinners who unhappily sleep in the death of sin, forgetful of God and of His love; and to give us the blessed sleep of the Sacred Spouse, of which He said: *Stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please* (Cant. ii. 7). This is the sleep that God gives to His beloved souls, which is none other, as St. Basil says, "but the most profound oblivion of all things"; and this is when the soul forgets all earthly things, to attend only to God and to the things that concern His glory.

There was a time, O my God, when I drove Thee away from me; but I trust that, by knocking so often at the door of my heart -- at one time by making it afraid, at another by enlightening it, then by words of love -- Thou hast already obtained an entrance there. This, I say, is my hope; because I feel a great confidence that I have already been forgiven by Thee; I feel a great hatred and repentance for the offences I have committed against Thee -- a repentance that gives me a great sorrow; but a sorrow that brings peace, a sorrow that comforts me and makes me hope assuredly for pardon from Thy goodness. I thank Thee, my Jesus, and I pray Thee never again to depart from my soul. I know indeed that Thou wilt not leave me, if I do not drive Thee away; and this is the grace I ask of Thee (and I pray Thee to give me Thy assistance that I may always seek it of Thee), that Thou wouldst not permit me ever to drive Thee from me. Make me forget everything, to think only of Thee Who hast always

thought of me and of my welfare. Make me always love Thee in this life, so that, breathing forth my soul in Thy arms, united to Thee, it may repose eternally in Thee without fear of losing Thee again. O Mary, assist me in life and assist me in death, so that Jesus may always repose in me, and that I may always repose in Jesus.

Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas

Morning Meditation

THE ETERNAL WORD BECOMES A SERVANT.

Jesus was bound in swaddling-clothes, says St. Ambrose, that I might be loosed from chains; His poverty is my patrimony; the feebleness of the Lord is my strength; His tears have washed away my guilt! O my Jesus, Thou hast been pleased to become a servant for love of me, and in order to release me from the chains of hell. Bind my heart to Thy feet that it may no more stray from Thee.

I.

Very great would be your ingratitude to your God, O Christian soul, if you were not to love Jesus after He has been pleased to be bound in swaddling-clothes, that you may be released from the chains of hell; after He has become poor, that you may be made partaker of His riches; after He has made Himself weak, to give you power over your enemies; after He has chosen to suffer and to weep, that by His tears your sins may be washed away.

But, O God, how few there are who show themselves grateful for so immense a love by faithfully loving this their Redeemer! Alas the greater part of men, after so incomparable a benefit, after so many great mercies and so much love, still say to God: Lord, we will not serve Thee; we would rather be slaves of the devil and condemned to hell, than be Thy servants. Listen how God upbraids such thankless wretches: *Thou hast burst my bands, and thou saidst: I will not serve* (Jer. ii. 20). What say you? Have you, too, been one of these? But tell me, whilst living far from God and the slave of the devil -- tell me, have you felt happy? Have you been at peace? Ah, no, the divine words can never fail: *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). Since thou hast preferred to serve thy enemy rather than to serve thy God, behold how that tyrant has treated thee. He has made thee groan as a slave in chains, poor, afflicted, and deprived of every interior consolation. But come, rise up; God speaks to thee whilst thou mayest still be freed from the fetters of death which bind thee: *Loose the bonds from off thy neck, O captive daughter of Sion* (Is. lii. 2).

O Jesus, I was once a slave of hell; but now that I am free from those unhappy chains, I consecrate myself entirely to Thee; I give Thee my body, my goods, my life, my soul, my will, and my whole liberty. I desire no longer to belong to myself, but only to Thee, my only Good. Ah, bind my heart to Thy feet, that it may no more stray from Thee. O most holy Mary! obtain for me the grace of living always bound to thy Son by the blessed chains of love. Tell Him to accept me as the slave of His love. He grants all that thou askest. Pray to Him, pray to Him, for me. This is my hope.

II.

Make haste while time is left, unbind thyself, poor soul, who hast become the voluntary slave of hell. Strike off these cursed chains that hold thee fast as a prey for hell; and bind thyself to God instead with chains of gold, chains of love, chains of peace, chains of salvation: *her bands are a healthful binding* (Ecclus. vi. 31). But in what manner are souls bound to God? By love: *Have charity, which is the bond of perfection* (Col. iii. 4). A soul that always walks by the single way of the fear of punishment, and from this single motive avoids sin, is always in great danger of quickly relapsing into sin; but he that attaches himself to God by love is sure not to lose Him as long as he loves Him; and for this reason we must continually beg God to grant us the gift of His holy love, always praying and saying: O Lord, keep me united with Thee, never suffer me to be separated from Thee and from Thy love. The fear which we ought rather to desire and beg of God is a filial fear, the fear of ever displeasing this our good Lord and Father. Let us, too, always have recourse to most holy Mary, our Mother, that she may obtain for us the grace to love nothing but our God, and unite us so closely by love to her Blessed Son, that we may never again see ourselves separated from Him by sin.

Ah, my God, after all the favours Thou hast shown me, after pardoning me so repeatedly, and when now Thou dost enlighten me with so clear a knowledge, and invitest me to love Thee with so tender an affection, if I should ever be so wretched as again to turn my back upon Thee, how could I presume ever to receive pardon afresh! Should I not fear that in the same instant Thou wouldst cast me headlong into hell? Ah, never permit it; let me say again: "Suffer me not to be separated from Thee."

O Mary, my refuge, thou hast hitherto been my sweet advocate; for it was thou who didst prevail on God still to wait for me and to pardon me with so much mercy; help me at present, obtain for me the grace to die, and to die a thousand times, rather than ever again to lose the grace of my God.

Spiritual Reading

THE FALL AND THE RESURRECTION OF MANY

Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel (Luke ii. 34).

Such was the language of holy Simeon when he had the consolation to hold in his arms the Infant Jesus. Among other things which he then foretold, he declared *that this child was set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel*. In these words holy Simeon extols the lot of the Saints, who, after this life, shall rise to a life of immortality in the kingdom of bliss, and he deploras the misfortune of sinners, who, for the transitory and miserable pleasures of this world, bring upon themselves eternal ruin and perdition. Yet, notwithstanding the greatness of his own misery, the unhappy sinner, reflecting only on the enjoyment of present gains, calls the Saints fools, because they wish to live in poverty, in humiliation and self-denial. But a day will come when sinners shall see their error and shall say: *We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour* (Wis. v. 9). *We fools!* Behold how they shall confess *themselves* truly *fools*!

What greater folly can be conceived than to have the power of being the friends of God, and to wish to be His enemies? Their living at enmity with God makes the lives of sinners unhappy in this world, and purchases for them an eternity of misery hereafter. St. Augustine relates that two courtiers entered a monastery of hermits, and that one of them began to read the

Life of St. Anthony. "He read," says the Saint, "and his heart was divested of the world." He read, and, in reading, his affections were detached from the earth. Turning to his companion, he exclaimed: "What do we seek? The friendship of the emperor is the most we can hope for. And how many perils does not that friendship bring upon us! Should we even obtain his friendship, how long will it last?" -- Friend, said he, fools that we are, what do we seek? Can we expect more in this life, by serving the emperor, than to gain his friendship? And when after many dangers we succeed in making him our friend, we shall expose ourselves to greater danger of eternal perdition. What difficulties must we encounter in order to become the friend of Cesar! -- "But, if I wish, I can in a moment become the friend of God." I can acquire His friendship by endeavouring to recover His grace. His divine grace is that infinite treasure which makes us worthy of His friendship. *For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God* (Wis. vii. 14).

The Gentiles believed it impossible for a creature to become the friend of God. But Jesus Christ has declared that if we observe His commands we shall be His friends. *You are my friends if you do the things that I command you* (Jo. xv. 14).

How great, then, is the folly of sinners, who, though they have it in their power to enjoy the friendship of God, wish to live at enmity with Him! The Lord does not hate any of His creatures: He does not hate the tiger, the viper or the toad. *For thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou hast made* (Wis. xi. 25). But He necessarily hates sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity* (Ps. v. 7). God cannot but hate sin, which is His enemy and diametrically opposed to His will; and therefore, in hating sin, He necessarily hates the sinner who is united with his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike* (Wis. xiv. 9).

The present life, as St. Gregory says, is the way by which we must reach Paradise, our true country.

But the misfortune of the greater part of mankind is that, instead of following the *Way of salvation*, they foolishly walk in the *road to perdition*. Some have a passion for earthly riches; and, for a vile interest, they lose the immense goods of Paradise. Others

have a passion for honours; and for a momentary applause, they lose their right to be kings in Heaven; others have a passion for sensual pleasures; and, for transitory delights, they lose the grace of God, and are condemned to burn for ever in a prison of fire. Miserable souls! if, in punishment of a certain sin, their hand was to be burned with a red-hot iron, or if they were to be shut up for ten years in a dark prison, they certainly would abstain from it. And do they not know that, in chastisement of their sins, they shall be condemned to remain for ever in hell, where their bodies, buried in fire, shall burn for all eternity? Some, says St. John Chrysostom, to save the body, choose to destroy the soul; but do they know not that, in losing their soul, their bodies shall be condemned to eternal torments? If we neglect the soul, we cannot save the body.

Now, instead of seeking to be friends of God, sinners wish to be the slaves of Satan, who is a cruel and merciless tyrant to all who submit to his yoke. And if Satan does promise delights, he does so, as St. Cyprian says, not for our welfare, but that we may be the companions of his torments in hell.

Only *the Saints, then, are truly wise*. For let us be persuaded that the truly wise are those who know how to love God and to gain Heaven. Happy the man to whom God has given the Science of the Saints! Ah! how sublime the Science which teaches us to know how to love God and to save our souls! Happy is the man, says St. Augustine, who knows God, although ignorant of other things! Oh, how many of the rude and illiterate are saved, because, though unable to read, *they know how to love God*; and how many of the wise ones of the world are damned! But the wonder is, that though worldlings themselves are fully persuaded of this truth, and constantly extol the merit of those who retire from the world to live only to God, they still act as though they believed it not.

Tell me, to which class do you wish to belong -- to the *wise of the world*, or to the *wise of God*? Before you make a choice, St. John Chrysostom advises you to go to the graves of the dead! Oh, how eloquently do the sepulchres of the dead teach us the Science of the Saints and the vanity of all earthly goods! "For me," said the Saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, bones, and

worms." As if he said: Among these skeletons I cannot distinguish the noble, the rich, or the learned. I see that they have all become dust and rottenness. Thus all their greatness and glory have passed away like a dream.

What, then, must we do? Behold the advice of St. Paul: *This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short: it remaineth that ... they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away* (1 Cor. vii. 29, 31). This world is a scene which shall pass away and end very soon: *The time is short*. During the days of life that remain, let us endeavour to live like men who are wise, not according to the world, but according to God, by attending to the sanctification of our souls and by adopting the means of salvation. Thus shall we be truly wise, and be happy for time and for eternity.

Evening Meditation

"HE DIFFERETH NOTHING FROM A SERVANT."

(Epistle for Sunday. Gal. iv. 1-5)

I.

He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, says St. Paul. On considering the immense mercy in the work of human redemption, St. Zachary had good reason to exclaim: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people* (Luke i. 68). Blessed forever be God Who hath vouchsafed to come down upon the earth and be made Man in order to redeem mankind: *That being delivered from the hands of our enemies, we may serve him without fear* (Ib. 74). In order that, loosened from the shackles of sin and death, wherein our enemies held us fast bound and enthralled, we may fearlessly, and with the freedom of the children of God, love Him and serve Him during this life, and afterwards go to possess and enjoy Him face to face in the kingdom of the Blessed that had been closed against us heretofore, but now thrown open to us by our divine Saviour.

We were, in fact, all the slaves of hell; but what has the Eternal Word, our Sovereign Lord, done to free us from that slavery? From being Lord He became a servant. And why?

Almighty God is Lord of all that is, or that can be in the world: *In thy power are all things; for thou hast created all* (Esther xiii.

9).

Now, though this Sovereign King bore sway over the Angels in Heaven, and ruled all creation, He did not rule over the hearts of men. Mankind was groaning under the miserable tyranny of the devil. But the Prophet Isaias long ago foretold that our Redeemer would destroy the empire which Satan held over mankind: *And the sceptre of their oppression thou hast overcome* (Is. ix. 4). Why does the Prophet call Satan an *oppressor*? Because, says St. Cyril, this heartless master exacts from the poor sinners who become his slaves heavy tribute, in the shape of passions, hatreds, disorderly affections by means of which he binds them in a still greater servitude and at the same time scourges them. Behold, Jesus is scarcely born, says the Venerable Bede, before He assumes Himself the form and office of a servant, in order to win us freedom from this slavery of Satan. In token of His servitude He begins to pay off our debts by His sufferings. God suffers Himself to be bound in swaddling-bands because He had come to free the world.

My Sovereign Lord and Redeemer, I was lost! Thou hast ransomed me from hell. But unhappy me! I have often since ruined myself again, and Thou hast as often released me again from eternal death. *I am Thine, save me*. Since, as I hope, I am Thine, suffer me never more to cast myself away by rebelling against Thee. I am resolved to suffer death, and a thousand deaths, rather than ever again become Thy enemy and the slave of hell. I entreat Thee to grant me Thy grace that I may always ask Thee for help to overcome the devil. O Mary, obtain this grace for me, by the love which thou bearest to thy Son.

II.

The world stood in admiration of that grand act of Charity which St. Paulinus performed in consenting to become a slave for the ransom of the son of a poor widow. But what comparison does this bear with the Charity of our Redeemer, Who, in order to rescue us from the slavery of the devil and from death, our just due, being God chose to become a servant, to be fast bound with cords, to be nailed to the Cross, and thereon in the end to lay down His life in a sea of sorrow and ignominy? In order, says St. Augustine, that the servant might become lord, God chose to

become a servant.

"O amazing condescension of Thy bounty towards us! O inestimable tenderness of Thy charity!" exclaims the Holy Church, "that Thou mightest redeem the servant Thou hast delivered up the Son." Thou, then, O God of boundless Majesty, hast been so fascinated with love for men, that to redeem these Thy rebellious servants Thou hast consented to condemn Thy only Son to death. But, O Lord, replies the holy man, Job: *What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him, or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?* (Job vii. 17). What is man, who is so vile and has proved so ungrateful to Thee, that Thou shouldst make him so great, by honouring and loving him to such an excess? Tell me, why are the salvation and happiness of man of so much importance to Thee? Tell me why Thou lovest him so much, that it would seem as if Thy Heart were set on nothing else but to love man and to make him happy?

Since Thou, O my Jesus, hast paid the price of my ransom, I beseech Thee let not that Blood which Thou hast shed for me be lost to me. I am sorry that I have despised Thee, O my Love -- but grant me more sorrow. Make me know the evil I have committed in offending Thee. Most holy Mary, pray to Jesus for me and for all sinners. Obtain for me light and grace to love thy Son Who has loved me so much.

Last Day of the Year

Morning Meditation

NEGLECT OF TIME

He hath called against me the time (Lament. i. 15).

All the time that is not spent for God is time lost. At the hour of death worldlings will wish for another year, another month, another day -- but they will not obtain it. They shall then be told that for them time shall be no more. Ah, my Jesus, I have been so many years in the world, and how many have I spent for Thee?

I.

There is nothing more precious than time, but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. This is what St. Bernard deplors when he says: "Nothing is more

precious than time, but nothing is regarded more cheaply." The Saint adds: "The days of salvation pass away, and no one reflects that the day which has passed away from him can never return." You will see a gambler spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is: "I am passing the time." You will see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who go by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing they will say: "We are passing the time." Poor blind sinners who lose so many days! Days that never return!

O time despised during life! you will be ardently desired by worldlings at the hour of death. They will then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it: they will then be told that time shall be no longer. How much would they then pay for another week, or another day, to settle the accounts of their conscience? To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Laurence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions. But this hour shall not be given.

Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast spent Thy whole life for the salvation of my soul. There has not been a single moment of Thy life in which Thou hast not offered Thyself to the Eternal Father to obtain for me pardon and eternal glory. I have been so many years in the world, and how many of them have I spent for Thee? Ah! all that I remember to have done produces remorse of conscience. The evil has been great, the good very little, and all full of imperfections and tepidity, of self-love and distractions. Ah, my Redeemer! all this has arisen from my forgetfulness of what Thou hast done for me. I have forgotten Thee, but Thou hast not forgotten me; when I fled from Thee, Thou didst follow me, and call me so often to Thy love.

II.

The Prophet exhorts us to remember God and to procure His friendship, before the light fails. *Remember thy Creator ... before the sun and the light be darkened* (Eccles. xii. 1). How great the distress and misery of a traveller who, when the night has come, perceives that he has missed his way, and that there is no time to correct his mistake. Such at death will be the anguish of the sinner who has lived many years in the world, and has not spent

them for God. *The night cometh, when no man can work* (Jo. ix. 4). For him death shall be the night in which he will be able to do nothing. *He hath called against me the time*. Conscience will then remind the worldling of all the time that God has given him, which he has spent in the destruction of his soul; of all the calls and graces that he has received from God for his sanctification, and these he has voluntarily abused. The sinner will then see that the way of salvation is forever closed. Hence he will weep and say: O fool that I have been! O time lost! O life misspent! O lost years, in which I could have become a Saint, but have not! And now the time of salvation is gone forever. But of what use are these sighs and lamentations, when the scene is about to close -- the lamp on the point of being extinguished -- and when the dying sinner has reached that awful moment on which eternity depends?

Behold me, O Jesus! I will resist no longer. Shall I wait till Thou abandon me? I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having separated myself from Thee by sin. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, worthy of infinite love. Ah! do not permit me ever again to lose the time which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. Ah! remind me always, O my beloved Saviour, of the love Thou hast borne me and of the pains Thou hast endured for me. Make me forget all things, that, during the remainder of my life, I may think only of loving and pleasing Thee. I love Thee, my Jesus, my Love, my All! I promise to make acts of love whenever Thou remindest me. Give me holy perseverance. I place all my confidence in the merits of Thy Blood. I also trust in thy intercession, O my dear Mother Mary!

Spiritual Reading

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE

IX. "REMUNERATUR COPIOSIUS"-A RELIGIOUS IS MORE ABUNDANTLY REWARDED.

Worldlings are blind to the things of God; they do not comprehend the greatness of eternal life, in comparison with which the present life is but a moment, almost nothing. If they were truly enlightened they would assuredly abandon their possessions -- even kings would abdicate their crowns -- and quitting the world, would retire into the cloister to attend to their eter-

nal salvation -- an exceeding difficult affair for persons living in the world. Bless, then, O Religious soul, and continually thank God, Who, by his lights and graces, has delivered you from the bondage of Egypt and brought you to His own house; prove your gratitude by fidelity to His service, and by a faithful correspondence with so great a grace. Compare the goods of this world with the eternal felicity which God has prepared for those who leave all things for His sake, and you will find that there is a greater disparity between the transitory joys of this life and the eternal beatitude of the Saints, than there is between a grain of sand and the entire creation.

Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever shall leave all things for His sake, shall receive a hundred-fold in this life, and eternal glory in the next. Who can ever doubt His words? Can you imagine that He will not be faithful to His promise? Is He not more liberal in rewarding virtue than severe in punishing vice? If they who give a cup of cold water in His Name shall not be left without reward, how great, how incomprehensible must be the reward which a Religious, who aspires to perfection, shall receive for the numberless works of piety which he performs every day! Reward for so many acts of charity, for abstinence, for so many Meditations, Offices, and Communions, for so many acts of mortification, for Spiritual Reading -- all of which a Religious who tends to perfection performs every day! Do you not know that these good works performed through obedience, and the other vows of Religious, merit a far greater reward than the good works of seculars? Brother Lacci, of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death to a certain person, and said that he and King Phillip the Second were crowned with bliss, but his own glory as far surpassed that of Philip, as the exalted dignity of a sovereign on earth is raised above the lowly station of a humble Religious.

The dignity of martyrdom is sublime; but the Religious state appears to possess something still more excellent. The Martyr suffers that he may not lose his soul; the Religious suffers to render himself more acceptable to God. A Martyr dies for the *Faith*; a Religious, for *perfection*. Although the Religious state has lost much of its primitive splendour, we may still say, with truth,

that the souls most dear to God, who have attained the greatest perfection, and who edify the Church by the odour of their sanctity, are, for the most part, to be found in Religion. How many shall we find in the world, even amongst the most fervent, who rise at midnight to pray and sing the praises of God? How many who spend five or six hours each day in these or similar works of piety? Who practise fasting, abstinence, and mortification? How many who observe silence, or accustom themselves to do the will of others rather than their own? And, surely, all these are performed by the Religious of every Order. Even in convents where discipline is relaxed, many are found who aspire to perfection, observe the Rule, and perform, in private, many works of supererogation. It is evident that the conduct of the generality of pious Christians in the world cannot be compared with that of a good Religious. No wonder, then, that St. Cyrian called virgins consecrated to God, *the flower of the garden of the Church, and the noblest portion of the flock of Jesus Christ*. St. Gregory Nazianzen says Religious "are the first fruits of the flock of the Lord, the pillars and crown of Faith, and the pearls of the Church." I hold as certain that the greater number of the seraphic thrones, which were left vacant by the fall of the unhappy associates of Lucifer, will be filled by Religious. Out of the sixty, who, during the last Century were enrolled in the Catalogue of Saints, or honoured with the appellation of "Blessed," all, with the exception of five or six belonged to Religious Orders. Jesus Christ once said to St. Teresa: "Woe to the world but for Religious." Ruffinus says: "It cannot be doubted that the world is preserved from ruin by the merits of Religious." When, therefore, the devil affrights you by representing the difficulty of observing your Rule, and practising self-denial and the austerities necessary for salvation, raise your eyes to Heaven, and the hope of eternal beatitude will give you strength and courage to suffer all things. The trials, mortifications, and the miseries of this life will end one day, and to them will succeed the ineffable delights of Paradise, which shall be enjoyed for eternity without fear of failure or of diminution.

Evening Meditation

JESUS WEEPING

I.

The tears of the Infant Jesus were very different from those of other newborn babes: these weep through pain; Jesus did not weep from pain, but through compassion for us and through love: "They weep on account of suffering, Christ out of compassion," says St. Bernard. Tears are a great sign of love. Therefore did the Jews say when they saw the Saviour weeping for the death of Lazarus: *Behold how he loved him* (Jo. xi. 36). Thus also might the Angels have said on beholding the tears of the Infant Jesus: "Behold how He loves them." Behold how our God loves men; since for the love of them we see Him made Man, become an Infant, and weeping. Jesus wept, and offered to His Father His tears to obtain for us the pardon of our sins. "These tears," says St. Ambrose, "washed away my sins." By His cries and tears He implored mercy for us who were condemned to eternal death, and thus He appeased the indignation of His Father.

My beloved Infant, whilst Thou wert weeping in the stable of Bethlehem, Thou wert thinking of me, beholding even my sins, which were the cause of Thy tears. And have I, O my Jesus, instead of consoling Thee by my love and gratitude at the thought of what Thou hast suffered to save me -- have I increased Thy grief and the cause of Thy tears? If I had sinned less Thou wouldst have wept less. Weep, yes, weep, for Thou hast cause to weep in seeing such great ingratitude of men for Thy so great love. But since Thou weepest, weep also for me; Thy tears are my hope. I also weep for the offences I have offered Thee, O my Redeemer; I hate them, I detest them, I repent of them with my whole heart. I weep for all those wretched days and nights of mine in which I lived Thy enemy and deprived of Thy beautiful grace; but what would my tears avail, O my Jesus, without Thine?

II.

Oh, how eloquently did the tears of this Divine little One plead in our behalf! Oh, how dear they were to God! It was then that the Father caused the Angels to proclaim that He made peace with men, and received them into His favour: *And on earth*

peace to men of good will (Luke ii. 14). Jesus wept through love, but He also wept through grief in seeing that so many sinners, even after all His tears and so much blood shed for their salvation, would yet continue to despise His grace. But who would be so hard-hearted, on seeing an Infant God weeping for our sins, as not to weep also, and detest those sins that have made this loving Saviour shed so many tears? Oh, let us not increase the sorrows of this Innocent Babe; but let us console Him by uniting our tears to His! Let us offer to God the tears of His Son, and let us beseech Him for their sake to forgive us!

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the tears of the Infant Jesus; for their sake forgive me. And Thou, my dear Saviour, offer to Him all the tears which Thou didst shed for me during Thy life, and with them appease Him for me. I beseech Thee also, O my Love, to soften my heart by these tears, and to inflame it with Thy holy love. Oh, that I could from this day forth console Thee by my love as much as I have pained Thee by offending Thee. Grant therefore, O Lord, that the days which remain to me of life may no more be spent in offending Thee, but only in weeping for the offences I have offered Thee, and in loving Thee with all the affections of my soul. O Mary, I beseech thee by that tender compassion which thou didst so often feel at seeing the Infant Jesus in tears, obtain for me a constant sorrow for the offences which I have ungratefully committed against Him.

New Year's Day

(Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord)

Morning Meditation

JESUS OUR SAVIOUR

Consider that the Infant Jesus, eight days after His Birth, showed Himself even then to be our Saviour, by shedding His divine Blood for us in the Circumcision, and taking the Name of *Saviour*. O most merciful Infant God, I give Thee thanks, and I beseech Thee by the pain which Thou didst feel, and by the Blood which Thou didst shed in Thy Circumcision, to grant me the grace and the power to tear out of my heart all earthly affections.

I.

Behold how the Eternal Father, having sent His Son to suffer and die for us, wills that on this day He should be circumcised, and should begin to shed His Divine Blood, which He has to shed for the last time on the day of His death upon the Cross in a sea of contumely and sorrow. And wherefore? In order that this innocent Son should thus pay the penalties which we have deserved. The Holy Church exclaims: "O admirable condescension of divine pity towards us! O inestimable love of charity! To redeem the slave Thou hast delivered Thy Son to death!"

O Eternal God, who could ever have bestowed upon us this infinite gift but Thou Who art infinite goodness and infinite love. O my God, if in giving me Thy Son, Thou hast given me the dearest treasure Thou hast, it is right that I should give myself entirely to Thee. Yes, my God, I give Thee my whole self; do Thou accept of me, and permit me not to leave Thee again.

II.

Behold, on the other hand, the Divine Son, Who, all humble, and full of love towards us, embraces the bitter death destined for Him in order to save us sinners from eternal death, and willingly begins on this day to make satisfaction for us to the divine justice with the price of His Blood. *He humbled himself*, says the Apostle, *becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8). Thou, therefore, O my Jesus, hast accepted death for my love; what, then, shall I do? Shall I continue to offend Thee by my sins? No, my Redeemer, I will no longer be ungrateful to Thee. I am sorry from my heart that I have caused Thee so much bitterness in times past. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and for the future I will never cease to love Thee.

Our Redeemer has said: *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jo. xv. 13). Thou, O my Jesus, as St. Paul tells us, hast shown greater love than this towards us, by giving Thy life for us who were Thy enemies. Behold one of them, O Lord, at Thy feet. How many times have I, a miserable sinner, renounced Thy friendship because I would not obey Thee! I now see the evil I have done; pardon me, my Jesus, for I could wish to die of sorrow. I now love Thee with my whole soul, and I desire nothing else but to love Thee and to please Thee. O Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, pray to

Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

THE NAME OF JESUS CONSOLES.

This great Name of Jesus was not given by man, but by God Himself; "The Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "was preordained by God." It was a new Name: *A new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name* (Is. lxii. 2). A new Name which God could give only to Him Whom He destined to be the Saviour of the world. A new and an eternal Name; because, as our salvation was decreed from all eternity, so from all eternity was this Name given to the Redeemer. Nevertheless this Name was only bestowed on Jesus Christ in this world on the day of His Circumcision: *And after eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus*. The Eternal Father wished at that time to reward the humility of His Son by giving Him so honourable a Name. Yes, while Jesus humbles Himself, submitting in His Circumcision to be branded with the mark of a sinner, it is just that His Father should honour Him by giving Him a Name that exceeds the dignity and sublimity of any other name: *God hath given him a name that is above all names* (Phil. ii. 9). And He commands that this Name should be adored by the Angels, by men, and by devils: *That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth* (Ibid. ii. 10). If, then, all creatures are to adore this great Name, still more ought we sinners to adore it, since it was in our behalf that this Name of Jesus, which signifies Saviour, was given to Him; and for this end also He came down from Heaven, namely, to save sinners: "For us men and for our salvation He came down from Heaven, and was made Man." We ought to adore Him, and at the same time to thank God Who has given Him this Name for our good; for it is this Name that consoles us, defends us, and makes us burn with love.

The Name of Jesus consoles us; for when we invoke Jesus, we find relief in all our afflictions. When we have recourse to Jesus, He wishes to console us because He loves us; and He can do so, because He is not only Man, but He is also the Omnipotent God; otherwise He could not properly have this great Name of *Saviour*. The Name of Jesus signifies that the bearer of it is of

infinite power, infinite wisdom and infinite love; so that if Jesus Christ had not united in Himself all these perfections, He could not have saved us: "If any one of these," says St. Bernard, "had been wanting, Thou couldst not call Thyself *Saviour*." Thus, when speaking of the Circumcision, the Saint says: "He was circumcised as being the son of Abraham, He was called Jesus as being the Son of God." He is branded as man with the mark of sin, having taken upon Himself the burden of atoning for sin; and from His very Infancy He began to satisfy for the crimes of men, by suffering and shedding His Blood.

The Name of Jesus is said by the Holy Spirit to be like oil poured out: *Thy name is as oil poured out* (Cant. i. 2). And so indeed it is, says St. Bernard; for as oil serves for light, for food, and for medicine, so especially the Name of Jesus is light: "it is a light when preached." And how was it, says the Saint, that the light of Faith shone forth so suddenly in the world that in a short time so many Gentile nations knew the true God, and became His followers, if it was not through hearing the Name of Jesus preached? "Whence, think you, shone forth in the whole world, so bright and so sudden, the light of Faith, except from the preaching of the Name of Jesus?" Through this Name we have been happily made sons of the true light, that is, sons of the Holy Church; since we were so fortunate as to be born in the bosom of the true Church, in Christian and Catholic kingdoms -- a grace which has not been granted to the greater part of men, who are born amongst idolaters, Mahometans, or heretics.

Further, the Name of Jesus is a food that nourishes our souls. "The thought of it is nourishment." This Name gives strength to find peace and consolation even in the midst of the miseries and persecutions of this world. The holy Apostles rejoiced when they were ill-treated and reviled, being comforted by the Name of Jesus: *They went from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus* (Acts. v. 41).

It is light, it is food, and it is also medicine to those who invoke it: "When pronounced, it soothes and anoints." The holy Abbot says: "At the rising of the light of this Name, the clouds disperse, and calm returns." If the soul of any one is afflicted and in trouble, let him pronounce the Name of Jesus, and immedi-

ately the tempest will cease and peace will return. Does any one fall into sin? Does he run in despair into the snares of death? Let him invoke the Name of Life, and will his life not be renewed? He shall immediately be encouraged to hope for pardon, by calling on Jesus, Who was destined by the Father to be our Saviour, and obtain pardon for sinners. Euthymius says that if when Judas was tempted to despair, he had invoked the Name of Jesus, he would not have given way to temptation: "If he had invoked that Name, he would not have perished." Therefore, he adds, no sinner can perish through despair, however abandoned he may be, who invokes the Holy Name, which is one of hope and salvation: "Despair is far off where His Name is invoked."

But sinners leave off invoking this saving Name, because they do not wish to be cured of their infirmities. Jesus Christ is ready to heal all our wounds; but if people cherish their wounds, and will not be healed, how can Jesus Christ heal them? The Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, a Sicilian nun, once saw the Saviour, as it seemed, in a hospital, going round with medicines in His hands, to cure the sick people who were there; but these miserable people, instead of thanking Him and begging Him to come to them, drove Him away. So do many sinners, after they have of their own free will poisoned their souls with sins, refuse the gift of health, that is, the grace offered them by Jesus Christ, and thus remain lost through their infirmities.

But, on the other hand, what fear can that sinner have who has recourse to Jesus Christ, since Jesus offers Himself to obtain our pardon from His Father, He having paid by His death the penalty due to us? St. Laurence Justinian says: "He Who had been offended, appointed Himself as Intercessor, and Himself paid what was owing to God." Therefore, adds the Saint, "if thou art bound down by sickness, if sorrows weary thee, if thou art trembling with fear, invoke the Name of Jesus." O poor man, whoever thou art, if thou art weighed down by infirmity or by grief and fear, call on Jesus, and He will console thee. It is enough that we pray to the Father in His Name, and all we ask will be granted to us. This is the promise of Jesus Himself, which He repeated many times, and which cannot fail: *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you* (Jo. xvi. 23). *Whatsoever*

er you shall ask of the Father in my name that will I do (Jo. xiv. 13).

Evening Meditation

HIS NAME WAS CALLED JESUS (Gospel, Luke ii. 21).

The Name of Jesus is a divine Name, announced to Mary on the part of God by St. Gabriel: *and thou shalt call his name Jesus* (Luke i. 31). For that reason it was called *a name above all names* (Phil. ii. 9). And it was also called a Name in which alone salvation is found: *whereby we must be saved* (Acts iv. 12).

This great Name is likened by the Holy Spirit unto oil: *Thy name is as oil poured out* (Cant. i. 2). For this reason, says St. Bernard, that as oil is *light, food, and medicine*, so the Name of Jesus is *light to the mind, food to the heart, and medicine to the soul*.

It is light to the mind. By this Name the world was converted from the darkness of idolatry to the light of Faith. We who have been born in these regions, where before the coming of Christ our ancestors were Gentiles, should all have been in the same condition had not the Messias come to enlighten us. How thankful ought we not, then, to be to Jesus Christ for the gift of Faith! And what would have become of us if we had been born in Asia, in Africa, in America, or in the midst of heretics and schismatics? He who believes not is lost: *He that believeth not shall be condemned* (Mark xvi. 16). And thus probably we also should have been lost.

O Jesus, Thou Who didst make the power of Thy Name to shine forth to deliver us from the servitude of sin, and the slavery of the devil, deign now and always to preserve our souls from all unworthy subjection. O Jesus all powerful, if the eyes of our souls had not been opened and enlightened by the light of Faith which Thou hast taught us by Thy own mouth, how should we ever have been able to know Thy divine mysteries! Without Thy aid we should always have been buried in the darkness of ignorance and the shadow of death. May thanks be ever given to our sweet Jesus Who has had compassion on us, and, in opening the gates of Heaven to us, has made us heirs of His Eternal Kingdom.

II.

The Name of Jesus is also food that nourishes our hearts; yes, because this Name reminds us of what Jesus has done to save us. Hence this Name consoles us in tribulation, gives us strength

to walk along the way of salvation, supplies us with courage in difficulties, and inflames us with love for our Redeemer, when we remember what He has suffered for our salvation.

Lastly, this Name is medicine to the soul, because it renders it strong against the temptations of our enemies. The devils tremble and fly at the invocations of this Holy Name, according to the words of the Apostle: *That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth* (Phil. ii. 10). He who in temptation calls upon Jesus shall not fall, and shall be saved: *Praising, I will call upon the Lord; and I will be saved from my enemies* (Ps. xvii. 4). And who was ever lost who when he was tempted invoked Jesus? He alone is lost who does not invoke His aid, or who, whilst the temptation continues, ceases to invoke Him. Oh, that I had always called upon Thee, my Jesus; for then I should never have been conquered by the devil! I have miserably lost Thy grace, because in temptation I have neglected to call Thee to my assistance. But now I hope for all things through Thy Holy Name. Write, therefore, O my Saviour, write upon my poor heart Thy most powerful Name of *Jesus*, so that, by having it always in my heart by loving Thee, I may have it always on my lips by invoking Thee, in all the temptations that hell prepares for me to induce me to again become its slave, and to separate myself from Thee. In Thy Name I shall find every good. If I am afflicted, it will console me when I think how much more afflicted Thou hast been than I am, and all for the love of me. If I am disheartened on account of my sins, it will give me courage when I remember that Thou camest into the world to save sinners. If I am tempted, Thy Holy Name will give me strength, when I consider that Thou canst help me more than hell can cast me down; finally, if I feel cold in Thy love, Thy Name will give me fervour, by reminding me of the love that Thou bearest me. I love Thee, my Jesus! To Thee do I give all my heart, O my Jesus! Thee alone will I love! Thee will I invoke as often as I possibly can. I will die with Thy Name upon my lips; a Name of hope, a Name of salvation, a Name of love. O Mary, if thou lovest me, this is the grace I beg of thee to obtain for me -- the grace constantly to invoke thy name and that of thy Son; obtain for me that these most sweet Names may be the

breath of my soul, and that I may repeat them constantly during life, in order to repeat them with my last breath. Jesus and Mary, help me; Jesus and Mary, I love You; Jesus and Mary I recommend my soul to You.

Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus

(The Sunday between Circumcision and Epiphany)

Morning Meditation

THE NAME OF JESUS A NAME OF GLADNESS

The Name of Jesus was given to the Incarnate Word, not by men, but by God Himself. *And Thou shalt call his name Jesus.* It is the Name of our Saviour, a Name of Gladness, a Name of Hope, a Name of Love. Thy Name, then, O Jesus, will always be my defence, my comfort, a fire to keep me always burning with Thy love.

I.

Consider that the Holy Name of Jesus is not a Name invented by man, but it comes from God, Who wished it to be made known by the Archangel Gabriel, as St. Luke testifies: *His name was called Jesus ... by the angel* (Luke ii. 21). St. Bernard also says that this Name is not a simple figure of things, or a shadow without reality. Jesus is a Name that expresses perfectly the hypostatic union of the Divine nature and the human nature. The world could not have been saved by God, for God could not suffer, nor by a mere man, because man is limited and finite. This is the reason why the Holy Name *Jesus*, which signifies the same as *Saviour*, as the Angel declares, has been given to the Son of God, made Man through Mary, to show that it was both as God and Man He accomplished the redemption of mankind by delivering men from the slavery of sin. In short, *Jesus* is a Name that comprises Infinity, Eternity, Immensity, Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, and all the adorable Perfections of God. What happiness for us to be reconciled with the Eternal Father through the merits of this divine Mediator Who of His infinite goodness paid our debt in His precious Blood! Adorable Jesus! if Thou hadst sacrificed Thyself to deliver Thy people from the hands of their enemies in order to acquire an eternal Name, it would be but fair that this Name should surpass and eclipse every other name, even that of

the Seraphim, as St. Paul says: *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they* (Heb. i. 4). And if the Eternal Father has wished that this Name should be that of His Son, mayest Thou grant that, having experienced on earth its happy effects, we may arrive at the complete happiness of Heaven to praise Thee and to bless Thee for all eternity.

II.

The Name of Jesus is a Name of Gladness, a Name of Hope, a Name of Love. It is a Name of Gladness, because if the remembrance of past transgressions afflicts us, this Name comforts us in the remembrance that the Son of God became Man for this purpose-to make Himself our Saviour. In fact, as soon as the Name of Jesus passes from the heart to the tongue, by the light of this divine Name darkness is dispersed, the mind is calmed, the heart is strengthened, the faculties brighten up, and everything returns to life. There is no name in the world equal to the Name of Jesus in sweetness. "Nothing is sweeter to chant," says St. Bernard, "nothing more agreeable to hear, nothing more charming to think of, than the Name of Jesus, the Son of God."

Oh, how happy shall we be if in all our trials, in all occasions of sorrow, we take care to invoke the glorious Name of Jesus, and while invoking it with our lips to consecrate our hearts to Jesus !

It is a Name of Hope, because he that prays to the Eternal Father in the Name of Jesus may hope for every good he asks for. *If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you* (Jo. xvi. 23).

It is a Name of Love. It is a sign that represents to us how much God has done for the love of us. The Name of Jesus brings to our remembrance all the sufferings which Jesus endured for us in life and in death. Therefore a devout writer exclaims: "O Jesus, how much it cost Thee to be *Jesus*-that is, my *Saviour*!"

O sweet Jesus, our Love and our Hope! Do Thou write Thy Name on my poor heart and on my tongue, in order that when I am tempted to sin, I may resist by invoking Thee; so that if I am tempted to despair I may trust in Thy merits; and that if I feel myself tepid in loving Thee, Thy Name may inflame my heart at the recollection of how much Thou hast loved me. Thy Name, then, will always be my defence, my comfort, and the fire that

shall always keep me inflamed with Thy love. Make me, therefore, always to call Thee my Jesus, and to live and die with Thy Holy Name on my lips, saying even with my last breath: "I love Thee, my Jesus; my Jesus, I love Thee." O Mary, my Queen, make me when I am dying invoke thee continually, together with thy Son Jesus.

Spiritual Reading

THE NAME OF JESUS OUR DEFENCE

The Name of Jesus defends us. Yes, it defends us against all the deceits and assaults of our enemies. For this reason the Messiah was called *God the Mighty* (Is. ix. 6); and His Name was called by the Wise Man a strong tower: *The name of the Lord is a strong tower* (Prov. xviii. 10); that we may know that he who avails himself of this powerful Name will not fear all the assaults of hell. St. Paul writes thus: *Christ humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8). Jesus Christ during His life humbled Himself in obeying His Father, even to die on the Cross; which is as much as to say, as St. Anselm remarks, He humbled Himself so much that He could humble Himself no more; and therefore His divine Father, as a reward for the humility and obedience of His Son, raised Him to such a sublime dignity that there could be no higher: *God hath given him a name which is above all names; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth* (Phil. ii. 9, 10). God gave Him a Name which is so great and powerful that it is venerated in Heaven, on earth, and in hell. A Name powerful in Heaven, because it can obtain all graces for us; powerful on earth, because it can save all who invoke it with devotion; powerful in hell, because this Name makes all the devils tremble. These rebel angels tremble at the sound of this most Sacred Name, because they remember that Jesus Christ was the Mighty One Who destroyed the dominion and power they formerly had over man. They tremble, says St. Peter Chrysologus, because at this Name they have to adore the whole Majesty of God "In this Name the whole majesty of God is adored." Our Saviour Himself said that through this powerful Name His disciples should cast out devils. *In my name they shall cast out devils* (Mark xvi. 17). And, in fact, the Church in her Exorcisms always

makes use of this Name in driving out the infernal spirits from those who are possessed. And priests who are assisting persons dying call to their aid the Name of Jesus, to deliver them from the assaults of hell, which at that last moment are so terrible.

In the Life of St. Bernardine of Sienna, we see how many sinners the Saint converted, how many abuses he put an end to, and how many cities he sanctified, by trying, when he preached, to induce the people to invoke the Name of Jesus. St. Peter says that there is no other Name given to us by which we can find salvation but this ever-blessed Name of Jesus: *For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved* (Acts iv. 12). Jesus is He Who has not only saved us, but continually preserves us from the danger of sin by His merits, each time we invoke Him with confidence: *Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do* (Jo. xiv. 13).

In temptations, then, I repeat with St. Laurence Justinian, "whether you are tempted by the devil, or are attacked by men, invoke the Name of Jesus." If the devils and men torment you and urge you to sin, call on Jesus, and you will be delivered; and if temptations do not cease to persecute you, continue to invoke Jesus, and you will never fall. Those who practise this devotion have experienced that they keep themselves safe, and that they always come off victorious.

Let us always add the holy Name of Mary, which is likewise terrible to hell, and we shall always be secure. "This short prayer -- Jesus and Mary -- is easy to remember," says Thomas a Kempis, "and powerful to protect; is strong enough to deliver us from all the assaults of our enemies."

Evening Meditation

THE NAME OF OUR SAVIOUR A NAME OF GREAT POWER

I.

Consider that the Name *Jesus* signifies *Saviour*; and St. Peter (Acts, iv. 12) assures us that the Eternal Father has not given to men any other Name by which they may be saved amidst the snares of this deceitful world, than the adorable Name of Jesus. It is this Name that makes the truth of Faith shine everywhere, and that calls all men from the abyss of darkness, to the adorable

light of the Gospel. It is by virtue of this adorable Name that the Apostle gave light to the blind, made the lame walk, healed the sick, raised the dead to life, and filled the whole world with wonder. And if the Angel at first announced that Jesus would bring life into the world by delivering it from the cruel slavery into which Adam had plunged it, this good Saviour confirmed this promise Himself when He declared that He had come so that His sheep might *have life, and might have it more abundantly* (Jo. x. 10). By virtue of His Name we see idolatry overthrown, to the great confusion of pagan princes and priests, who did all in their power to uphold it.

O amiable and Holy Name of Jesus, may the Seraphim of Heaven give Thee suitable thanks for me, and never cease to praise Thee by ever repeating that Thou dost merit all glory, all honour, and all power. My sweet Saviour, I hope to obtain, by virtue of Thy Name, the salvation of my body and soul; I hope that with this glorious Name in my heart and on my lips, victorious over the world and the flesh, I shall have the happiness to sing Thy praises and to bless the august Trinity for ever and ever.

II.

Consider also the efficacy of the adorable Name of Jesus in making our prayers pleasing to God, and in obtaining all that we ask of Him. This Name opens for us the way to arrive promptly at the feet of the Most High, and to have our prayers heard at once. The Gospel attests that the prayers of Jesus Himself have always been heard by virtue of His great Name, and that He authorizes us to say, when speaking to God: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven." In consideration of the Name of Jesus, God looks with a favourable eye upon our petition. For this reason Jesus exhorted the Apostles, and exhorts us all, that we should ask of His Father in His Name, in order to be sure that we shall obtain what we seek: *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you* (Jo. xvi. 23). It is enough for Him to hear the petition, and He will bestow upon us the favours that have been asked of Him in the Name of His Beloved Son, with Whom He is well pleased, and Who, in order to satisfy His offended justice, has shown Himself obedient even unto death. We should, then, know how to profit by the efficacious power of the Holy Name of Jesus;

being sure that our prayers will be heard, we should often, every hour of the day, repeat our prayers to the Eternal Father, and we shall advance in perfection on the road of the divine precepts, until we attain the happiness of seeing and possessing Him for all eternity in Heaven.

O Sweet Jesus, our Love and our Hope, since Thou hast deigned to assume mortal flesh, in order to open to us the gate of mercy, and to render our prayers efficacious by virtue of Thy glorious Name, grant that our prayers for the grace of perseverance may be heard, so that, faithful to the Divine law to the end of our lives, we may, with Thy Holy Name on our lips, pass from this valley of tears to the glory of Paradise.

January the Third

Morning Meditation

THE VALUE OF TIME

Son, observe the time (Ecclus. iv. 23).

Time is a treasure of inestimable value because in every moment of time we can gain an increase of grace and eternal glory. If the Blessed in Heaven could grieve they would do so for having lost so much time; and in hell the lost souls are tormented with the thought that there is now no more time for them. *Son, observe the time.*

I.

Son, says the Holy Ghost, be careful to observe the time, the greatest and most precious gift which God can bestow upon you in this life. The very Pagans knew the value of time. Seneca said that "no price is an equivalent for it." But the Saints have understood its value still better.* According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, a moment of time is of as much value as God; because in each moment a man can, by acts of contrition or of love, acquire the grace of God and eternal glory.

*The holy writer himself, St. Alphonsus, made a vow, "never to lose a moment of time."

Time is a treasure which can be found only in this life: it is not to be found in the next, in hell or in Heaven. In hell the damned exclaim with tears: O that an hour were given to us! They would pay any price for an hour of time in which they

might repair their ruin, but this hour they will never have! In Heaven there is no weeping; but were the Saints capable of weeping, all their tears would arise from the thought of having lost the time in which they could have acquired greater glory, and from the conviction that this time will never again be given to them. A Benedictine nun appeared after death in glory to a certain person and said she was perfectly happy, but that if she could desire anything it would be to return to life and to suffer pains and privations in order to merit an increase of glory. She added that for the glory which corresponds to a single *Ave Maria*, she would be content to endure till the Day of Judgment the painful illness that caused her death.

O my God, I thank Thee for the time which Thou givest me to repair the disorders of my past life. Were I to die at this moment the remembrance of the time I have lost would be one of my greatest torments. Ah, my Lord, Thou hast given me time to love Thee and I have spent it in offending Thee! I deserved to be sent to hell from the first moment in which I turned my back upon Thee, but Thou hast called me to repentance and hast pardoned me. I promised to offend Thee no more and how often have I returned to sin! How often hast Thou pardoned me my ungrateful relapses! Blessed for ever be Thy Mercy! Ah, how sorry I feel for having offended so good a God!

II.

Walk whilst you have the light (Jo. xii. 35).

How are you spending your time? Why do you always defer till tomorrow what you can do today? Remember that the time past is no longer yours: the future is not under your control: you have only the present for the performance of good works. Why, O miserable man, says St. Bernard, do you presume on the future as if God had placed time in your power! How can you who are not sure of an hour, promise yourself tomorrow? asks St. Augustine. If, then, says St. Teresa, you are not prepared for death today, tremble lest you die an unhappy death. *Walk whilst you have the light*.

We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have the light; for at the hour of death His light is taken away. Death is not a time for preparing, but for finding ourselves

prepared. *Be ye ready* (Luke xii. 40). At the hour of death we can do nothing: what is then done is done. *Behold now is the acceptable time* (2 Cor. vi. 2). In the lives of the Saints there is no *tomorrow*. *Tomorrow* is found in the lives of sinners who are ever saying: *Hereafter! Hereafter!* And in this state they continue till death.

My Saviour, the patience alone with which Thou hast waited for me ought to enamour me of Thee. Ah! do not suffer me to live any longer ungrateful for the love Thou hast shown me. Detach me from every creature and draw me entirely to Thyself. O my God, I will no longer waste the time Thou givest me to repair the evil which I have done. I will spend it all in serving and loving Thee. Give me holy perseverance. I love Thee, infinite Goodness, and hope to love Thee for ever. I thank thee, O Mary. By thy advocacy thou hast obtained for me the time which is given me. Assist me now, and obtain for me the grace to spend it all in loving thy Son, my Redeemer, and in loving thee, my Queen and Mother.

Spiritual Reading

THE NAME OF JESUS INFLAMES WITH HOLY LOVE.

The Name of Jesus not only *consoles us* and *preserves us from all evil*, but it also *inflames with holy love* all those who pronounce it with devotion. The Name of Jesus, that is, of Saviour, is a Name which expresses in itself love, for it recalls to us how much Jesus Christ has done and suffered to save us. "The Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "places before thee all that God has done for the human race." So that a pious author said, with all the affection of his heart: "O my Jesus, how much did it cost Thee to be *Jesus*, that is, my *Saviour!*"

St. Matthew writes, when speaking of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: *And they put over his head his cause written: This is Jesus the King of the Jews* (xxvii. 37). The Eternal Father so ordained that on the Cross on which our Redeemer died should be written: "This is Jesus, the Saviour of the world." Pilate wrote this, not that he had judged Jesus guilty because He took to Himself the title of King, for Pilate made no account of this accusation: and besides, at the same time that he condemned Him he declared Him innocent, and protested that he had no part in His death: *I am innocent of the blood of this just man* (Matt. xxvii. 24).

Why, then, did he give Him the title of King? He wrote it by the will of God, Who thereby wished to say to us men -- Do you know why My innocent Son is dying? He is dying because He is your Saviour; this divine Pastor dies on this infamous tree in order to save you, His sheep. Therefore it was said in the sacred Canticles: *His name is as oil poured out* (Cant. i. 2). St. Bernard explains this, saying: "that is, the effusion of the Divinity." In the Redemption God Himself, out of the love which He bore us, gave Himself and communicated Himself entirely to us: *He hath loved us and hath delivered Himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). And that He might be able to communicate Himself to us, He took upon Himself the burden of suffering the pains due to us. *He hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows* (Is. liii. 4). "By this title," says St. Cyril of Alexandria, "He blotted out the decree issued against the human race," according to the words of the Apostle: *Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us* (Col. ii. 14). Our loving Redeemer wished to deliver us from the malediction we had deserved, by making Himself the object of the divine curse in taking all our sins upon Himself: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us* (Gal. iii. 13).

Therefore it is not possible for a soul that is faithful in invoking the Name of Jesus, and remembering all that He has done to save us, not to be inflamed with love towards One Who has loved us so much. "When I utter the Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "I see before me a Man of meekness, humility, kindness, and mercy, Who at the same time is the Almighty God, Who heals and strengthens me." When we say *Jesus*, we should imagine to ourselves that we see a Man, meek, benignant, kind, and full of virtues; and know that He is our God, Who, to cure our wounds, chose to be despised, wounded, and even to die of pure grief on a Cross. St. Anselm, therefore, exhorts all who call themselves Christians to cherish the beautiful Name of Jesus, to have it always in their hearts, that it may be their only food, their only consolation. "Let Jesus be ever in thy heart. Let Him be thy food, thy delight, thy consolation." Ah, says St. Bernard, it is he who experiences it, that can alone know what sweetness, what a paradise it is even in this valley of tears, truly to love Jesus.

"The love of Jesus, what it is, None but His lov'd ones know."

Well did St. Rose of Lima know this happiness, from whose mouth came forth such a burning flame of love, after she had received Holy Communion, that it burned the hands of those who gave her water (as was the custom) to drink after Communion; as also did St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, who, with a Crucifix in her hand, cried out, burning with love: "O God of love! O God of love! Even mad with love!"; and St. Philip Neri, whose ribs were forced out to give room to his heart, burning with divine love, to beat more freely; and St. Stanislaus Kostka, who was obliged to have his breast bathed with cold water to mitigate the great ardour with which he was burning for the love of Jesus; and St. Francis Xavier, who, for the same cause, uncovered his breast, saying: "Lord, it is enough! No more!" -- in this way declaring himself unable to bear the great flame that was burning in his heart.

Let us also try as much as we can to keep Jesus in our hearts by loving Him, and to keep Him on our lips by often calling on Him. St. Paul says that the Name of Jesus cannot be pronounced with devotion except by the operation of the Holy Spirit: *And no man can say the Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost* (1 Cor. xii. 3). So that the Holy Spirit communicates Himself to all those who devoutly pronounce the Name of Jesus.

The Name of Jesus is unappreciated by many, and why? Because they love not Jesus. The Saints have always on their lips this Name of salvation and love. There is not a page in all the Epistles of St. Paul in which the Name of Jesus is not found many times repeated; and it is the same in the writings of St. John. The Blessed Henry Suso, the more to increase his love for this Holy Name, one day with a sharp iron engraved the Name of Jesus over his heart; and being all bathed in his blood, he said: "Lord, I desire to write Thy Name on my heart itself, but I cannot; Thou Who canst do everything, imprint, I pray Thee, Thy sweet Name on my heart, so that neither Thy Name nor Thy love may ever be effaced from it." St. Jane Frances de Chantal imprinted the Name of Jesus on her heart with a hot iron.

Jesus Christ does not expect so much from us. He is satisfied if we keep Him in our hearts by love, and if we often invoke Him

with affection. And as whatever He did and said during life was all for us, so it is but just that whatever we do, we should do it in the Name of Jesus Christ, and for His love, as St. Paul exhorts us: *All whatsoever you do, in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Col. iii. 17). And if Jesus has died for us, we ought to be ready willingly to give our lives for the Name of Jesus Christ, as the same Apostle declared he was ready to do: *For I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts xxi. 13).

If we are in affliction, let us invoke Jesus, and *He will console us*. If we are tempted, let us invoke Jesus and *He will give us strength* to withstand our enemies. If, lastly, we are in aridity, and are cold in divine love, let us invoke Jesus, and *He will inflame our hearts*. Happy are they who have this most tender and Holy Name always on their lips! A Name of peace, a Name of hope, a Name of salvation, and a Name of love. And oh happy shall we be if we are fortunate enough to die pronouncing the Name of Jesus! But if we desire to breathe out our last sigh with this sweet Name on our tongue, we must accustom ourselves to repeat it often during our life.

Let us always add the beautiful Name of Mary, which is also a Name given from Heaven, and is a powerful Name which makes hell tremble; and is besides a sweet Name, in that it reminds us of that Queen who, being the Mother of God, is also our Mother, the Mother of Mercy, the Mother of Love.

Evening Meditation

THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE INFANT JESUS IN THE STABLE OF BETHLEHEM

I.

There are two principal occupations of a solitary -- to pray, and to do penance. Behold the Infant Jesus in the little Grotto of Bethlehem giving us the example. He, in the Crib which He chose for His oratory upon earth, never ceases to pray, and to pray continually, to the Eternal Father. There He constantly makes acts of adoration, of love, and of prayer.

Before the coming of Jesus, the God made Man, the Divine Majesty had been, it is true, adored by men and by Angels; but God had not received from all these creatures that honour which

the Infant Jesus gave Him by adoring Him in the stable where He was born. Let us, therefore, constantly unite our adoration to that of Jesus Christ, when He was upon this earth.

Oh, how beautiful and perfect were the acts of love which the Incarnate Word made to His Father in His prayer! God had given to man the commandment to love Him with all his heart and all his strength, but this precept had never been perfectly fulfilled by any man. The first to accomplish it amongst women was Mary, and amongst men the first was Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled it in a degree infinitely superior to Mary. The love of the Seraphim may be said to be cold in comparison with the love of this Holy Infant. Let us learn from Him to love the Lord our God as He ought to be loved; and let us beseech Him to communicate to us a spark of that pure love with which He loved the Divine Father in the stable of Bethlehem.

My dear Redeemer, how much do I owe Thee! If Thou hadst not prayed for me, in what state of ruin should I not find myself! I thank Thee, O my Jesus; Thy prayers have obtained for me the pardon of my sins, and I hope that they will also obtain for me perseverance unto death. Thou hast prayed for me, and I bless Thee with my whole heart for it; but I beseech Thee not to leave off praying for me. I know that Thou dost continue even in Heaven to be our advocate: *We have an advocate, Jesus Christ; Who also maketh intercession for us* (I Jo. ii. 1., Rom. viii. 34). Continue therefore to be my *Advocate* who am in so much need of Thy *intercession*. I hope God has already pardoned me through Thy merits; but as I have already so often fallen, I may therefore fall again. Hell does not cease, and will not cease, to tempt me, in order to make me again lose Thy friendship.

II.

Oh, how beautiful, perfect, and dear to God were the prayers of the Infant Jesus! At every moment He prayed to His Father, and His prayers were all for us and for each one of us in particular. All the graces that each of us has received from the Lord, our being called to the true Faith, our having had time given us for repentance, the lights, the sorrow for sins, the pardon of them, the holy desires, the victory over temptations, and all the other good acts that we have made, or shall make,

of confidence, of humility, of love, of thanksgiving, of offering, of resignation -- all these Jesus has obtained for us, and all have been the effect of the prayers of Jesus. Oh, how much do we owe Him! And how much ought we not to thank Him and to love Him!

Ah, my Jesus, Thou art my hope; it is Thou Who must give me fortitude to resist; from Thee I seek it, and of Thee I hope for it. But I will not content myself with the grace not to fall again; I desire also the grace to love Thee exceedingly. My death approaches. If I were to die now, I should indeed hope to be saved; but I should love Thee little in Paradise because I have loved Thee but little hitherto. I will love Thee much in the days that remain to me that I may love Thee still more in eternity. O Mary, my Mother, do thou also pray and beseech Jesus for me. Thy prayers are all-powerful with thy Son Who loves thee much. Beseech Jesus to give me a great love for Him, and let this be constant and for ever.

First Friday of January

Morning Meditation

*THE HEART OF JESUS FULL OF SUFFERINGS EVEN
FROM HIS INFANCY*

My sorrow is continually before me (Ps. xxvii. 18).

We have been accustomed to hear of the Creation, the Incarnation, the Redemption; of Jesus born in a stable, of Jesus dead upon the Cross. O my God, if we knew that another man had conferred on us any of these benefits we could not help loving him. 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 with!

I.

Consider that in the moment that the soul of Jesus Christ was created and united to His little body in the womb of Mary, the Eternal Father intimated to His Son His will that He should die for the Redemption of the world; and in this same moment He presented to His view the entire dreadful scene of the sufferings He would have to endure, even unto death, in order to

redeem mankind. Our Divine Redeemer saw in that moment all the labours, contempt, and poverty He would have to suffer during His whole life, in Bethlehem as in Egypt and in Nazareth; all the sufferings and ignominy of His Passion, the scourges, the thorns, the nails, and the Cross; all the weariness, the sadness, the agonies, and the abandonment in which he was to end His life upon Calvary.

When Abraham was leading his son to death, he would not inform him of it to his affliction beforehand, even during the short time that was necessary for them to arrive at the Mount. But the Eternal Father chose that His Incarnate Son, Whom He had destined to be the Victim of His justice in atonement for our sins, should, from the beginning, suffer all the pains to which He was to be subject during His life and at His death.

O sweet, O amiable, O loving Heart of Jesus! even from Thy infancy Thou wert full of bitterness; and Thou didst suffer agonies in the womb of Mary without consolation, and without any one to look upon Thee and to console Thee. All this Thou didst suffer, O my Jesus, in order to satisfy for the eternal sorrow and agony which I deserved to endure in hell for my sins. Thou didst suffer deprived of all relief, to save me who have had the boldness to forsake God, and to turn my back upon Him, in order to satisfy my miserable inclinations. I thank Thee, O afflicted and loving Heart of my Lord! I thank Thee and I sympathise with Thee, especially when I see that whilst Thou dost suffer so much for men, these very men do not even pity Thee. O love of God, O ingratitude of man! O men, O men, behold this little innocent Lamb Who is in agony for you, to satisfy the divine justice for the injuries you have committed against Him. See how He prays and intercedes for you with His Eternal Father; behold Him and love Him.

II.

Wherefore, from the first moment that He was in His Mother's womb, Jesus suffered continually that sorrow which He endured in the Garden, and which was sufficient to have taken away His life as He said: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death* (Matt. xxvi. 38). From that time forth He felt most vividly all the sorrows and contumely that awaited Him.

The whole life of our Blessed Redeemer was a life of pains and tears: *My life is wasted with grief, and my years in sighs* (Ps. xxx. 11). His divine Heart was never for one moment free from suffering. Whether He watched or slept, whether He laboured or rested, whether He prayed or spoke, He had continually before His eyes that bitter representation which tormented His holy Soul more than their sufferings tormented the holy Martyrs. The Martyrs suffered, but, assisted by grace, they suffered with joy and fervour. Jesus Christ suffered, but He suffered with a Heart full of weariness and sorrow; and He accepted all for love of us.

O my Redeemer, how few there are who think of Thy sorrows and Thy love! O God, how few there are who love Thee! Unhappy me, I also have lived so many years forgetful of Thee! Thou hast suffered so much in order to be loved by me, and I have not loved Thee. Forgive me, my Jesus, forgive me, for I will amend my life and I will love Thee. Ah, wretched me if I still resist Thy grace, and in resisting damn myself! All the mercies Thou hast shown me, and above all, Thy sweet voice now calling me to love Thee -- all these great graces will be, if I resist them, my greatest punishment in hell. O my beloved Jesus, have pity on me, and let me live no longer ungrateful to Thy love. Give me light; give me strength to conquer everything in order to accomplish Thy will. My dearest Mother Mary, help me. It is thou who hast obtained for me all the favours I have received from God.

Spiritual Reading

"THE GRACE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR HATH APPEARED."

Alexander the Great, after he had conquered Darius and subdued Persia, wished to gain the affection of that people, and so went about dressed in the Persian costume. In like manner God would appear to act. In order to draw towards Himself the affections of men, He clothed Himself completely after the human fashion, and appeared as Man: *in shape found as a man* (Phil. ii. 7). By this means He wished to make known the depth of the love which He bore to man: *The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men* (Tit. ii. 11).

Man does not love Me, God would seem to say, because

he does not see Me. I wish to make Myself seen by him and to converse with him, and thus make Myself loved: *He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men* (Baruch iii. 38).

The Divine love for man was extreme, and had been from all eternity: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee* (Jer. xxxi. 3). But heretofore it had not appeared how great and inconceivable this love was that manifested itself when the Son of God showed Himself a little One in a stable on a bundle of straw: *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared* (Tit. ii. 4). The Greek text reads: *The singular love of God towards men appeared*. St. Bernard says that from the beginning the world had seen the *Power* of God in creation, and His *Wisdom* in the government of the world; but only in the Incarnation of the Word was it seen how great was His *Mercy*. Before God made Man was seen upon earth, men could not conceive an idea of the Divine *Goodness*; therefore did He take mortal flesh, that, appearing as Man, He might make plain to men the greatness of His benignity.

And in what other way could the Lord better display to thankless man His goodness and His love? Man, by despising God, says St. Fulgentius, put himself aloof from God forever; and as man was unable to return to God, God came in search of him on earth. St. Augustine had already said this: "Because we would not go to the Mediator, He condescended to come to us."

I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love (Osee. xi. 4). Men allow themselves to be drawn by love; the tokens of affection shown to them are a sort of chain which binds them, and, in a sense, forces them to love those by whom they are loved. For this end the Eternal Word chose to become Man, to draw to Himself by the greatest proof of affection the love of men. God was made Man that God might be more easily loved by man. It seems that our Redeemer wished to signify this very thing to a devout Franciscan called Father Francis of St. James, as is related in the Franciscan Diary for the 15th of December. Jesus frequently appeared to him as a lovely Infant; and the holy friar longed in his fervour to hold Him in his arms, but the sweet Child always fled away; whereupon the servant of God lovingly complained of this. One day the divine Child again appeared

to him; but how? He appeared with golden chains in His hands wherewith they should be bound as prisoners one with the other and never to be separated. Francis, emboldened at this, fastened the chains to the foot of the Infant, and bound Him to his heart; and, in very truth, from that time forward it seemed to him as if he saw the beloved Child in the prison of his heart, a perpetual Prisoner. That which Jesus did with this His servant He really has done with all men when He Himself became Man; He wished to be, as it were, enchained by us with such a prodigy of love and at the same time to enchain our hearts by obliging them to love Him, according to the prophecy of Osee: *I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.*

In divers ways, says St. Leo, had God already benefited man; but in no way has He more clearly exhibited the excess of His bounty than in sending him a Redeemer to teach him the way of salvation, and to procure for him the life of grace. "The Goodness of God has imparted gifts to the human race in various ways; but it surpassed the ordinary bounds of its abundant kindness when, in Christ, Mercy Itself came down to those who were in sin, Truth to those who were wandering in error, and Life to those who were dead."

Evening Meditation

THE KINDNESS OF JESUS OUR GOD

I.

Forget not the kindness of thy surety (Ecclus. xxix. 19).

St. Francis of Sales called Mount Calvary *the mountain of lovers*. It is impossible to remember that Mount and not love Jesus Christ, Who died there for love of us.

O God! how is it that men do not love this God Who has done so much to be loved by men! Before the Incarnation of the Word, man might have doubted whether God loved him with a true love; but after the coming of the Son of God, and after His dying for the love of men, how can we possibly doubt His love? "O man," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "look on that Cross, on those torments, and that cruel death, which Jesus has suffered for thee: after so great and so many tokens of His love, thou canst no longer entertain a doubt that He loves thee, and loves thee exceedingly." And St. Bernard says that "the Cross

and every Wound of our Blessed Redeemer cry aloud to make us understand the love He bears us."

In this grand Mystery of man's Redemption, we must consider how Jesus employed all His thoughts and zeal to discover every means of making Himself loved by us. Had He merely wished to die for our salvation, it would have been sufficient had He been slain by Herod with the other children; but no, He chose before dying to lead for thirty-three years a life of hardship and suffering; and during that time, in order to win our love, He appeared in several different guises. First of all, as a poor child, born in a stable; then as a little boy helping in the workshop; and finally, as a criminal, executed on a Cross. But before dying on the Cross, we see Him in many different states, one and all calculated to excite our compassion, and to make Himself loved: in agony in the Garden, bathed from head to foot in a sweat of blood; afterwards, in the court of Pilate, torn with scourges; then treated as a mock king, with a reed in His hand, a ragged garment of purple on His shoulders, and a crown of thorns on His head; dragged publicly through the streets to death with the Cross upon His shoulders; and at length, on the hill of Calvary, suspended on the Cross by three iron nails. Tell me, does He merit our love or not, this God Who has vouchsafed to endure all these torments, and to use so many means in order to captivate our love? Father John Rigouleux used to say: "I would spend my life in weeping for the love of a God Whose love induced Him to die for the salvation of men."

O most beautiful and most loving Heart of Jesus, miserable is the heart which does not love Thee! O God, for the love of men Thou didst die on the Cross, helpless and forsaken, and how then can men live so forgetful of Thee? O love of God! O ingratitude of man!

II.

Forget not the kindness of thy surety; for he hath given his life for thee (Ecclus. xxix. 19). Be not unmindful of Him Who has stood surety for thee; Who, to satisfy for thy sins, was willing to pay off, by His death, the debt of punishment due by thee. Oh, how desirous is Jesus Christ that we should continually remember His Passion! And how it saddens Him to see that we are so

unmindful of it! Were a person to endure for one of his friends, affronts, blows, and imprisonment, how afflicting would it be for him to know that that friend afterwards never gave it a thought, and cared not even to hear it spoken of! On the contrary, how gratified would he be to know that his friend constantly spoke of it with the warmest gratitude, and often thanked him for it. So it is pleasing to Jesus Christ when we preserve in our minds a grateful and loving recollection of the sorrows and death which He suffered for us. Jesus Christ was the Desired of all the ancient Fathers; He was the Desired of all nations before He was yet come upon earth. Now, how much more ought He to be our only desire and our only Love, now that we know that He is really come, and are aware how much He has done and suffered for us -- so that He even died upon the Cross for love of us!

O men, O men! do but cast one look on the innocent Son of God, agonising on the Cross and dying for you, in order to satisfy the divine justice for your sins, and by this means to allure you to love Him. Observe how, at the same time, He prays His Eternal Father to forgive you. Behold Him, and love Him. Ah, my Jesus, how small is the number of those who love Thee! wretched, too, am I, for I also have lived so many years unmindful of Thee, and have grievously offended Thee, my beloved Redeemer! It is not so much the punishment I have deserved that makes me weep, as the love which Thou hast borne me. O sorrows of Jesus! O ignominies of Jesus! O wounds of Jesus! O death of Jesus! O love of Jesus! rest deeply engraved in my heart, and may your sweet recollection be forever fixed there, to wound me and inflame me continually with love. I love Thee, my Jesus; I love Thee, my Sovereign Good; I love Thee, my Love and my All; I love Thee and I will love Thee for ever. Oh, suffer me never more to forsake Thee, never more to lose Thee! By the merits of Thy death make me entirely Thine. In this I firmly trust. And I have great confidence in thy intercession, O Mary, my Queen; make me love Jesus Christ, and make me also love thee, my Mother and my hope!

First Saturday of January
Morning Meditation

MARY'S PRAYERS FOR US ARE ALWAYS HEARD.

St. Bernard exhorts us to seek grace and to seek it through Mary, for, he says, she is a Mother to whom nothing can be denied. If, then, we wish to be saved, let us recommend ourselves to Mary for her prayers will always be heard.

I.

Jesus is the Mediator of Justice; Mary, the Mediatrix of Grace. For, as St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. Germanus, St. Antoninus and others say it is the will of God to dispense through the hands of Mary whatever graces He is pleased to bestow upon us. With God, the prayers of the Saints are the prayers of His friends, but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of His Mother! The most pleasing devotion to the Blessed Virgin is ever to have recourse to her and to say: O Mary, intercede for me with thy Son Jesus.

Jesus is omnipotent by nature; Mary is omnipotent by grace; she obtains whatever she asks. It is impossible, says St. Antoninus, that this Mother should ask any favour of her Son for those who are devout to her and the Son not grant her request. Jesus delights to honour His Mother by granting whatever she asks of Him. Hence St. Bernard exhorts us to seek for grace and to seek it through Mary; because she is a Mother to whom nothing can be denied. If, then, we would be saved, let us recommend ourselves to Mary, that she may intercede for us, because her prayers are always heard. O Mother of Mercy, have pity on me. Thou art styled the advocate of sinners; assist me, therefore, a sinner who places his confidence in thee.

II.

Let us not doubt that Mary will hear us when we address our prayers to her. It is her delight to exercise her powerful influence with God in obtaining for us whatever graces we stand in need of. It is sufficient to ask favours of Mary to obtain them. If we are unworthy of them, she renders us worthy by her powerful intercession; and she is very desirous that we should have recourse to her, that she may save us. What sinner ever perished, who, with confidence and perseverance, had recourse to Mary, the refuge of sinners? He is lost who has not recourse to Mary.

O Mary, my Mother and my hope! I take refuge under thy

protection; reject me not, as I have deserved. Protect me and have pity on me, a miserable sinner. Obtain for me the forgiveness of my sins; obtain for me holy perseverance, the love of God, a good death, and a happy eternity. I hope all things of thee, because thou art most powerful with God. Make me holy, since, by thy holy intercession, thou hast it in thy power to do so. O Mary, in thee, next to thy divine Son Jesus, do I confide; in thee do I place all my hope.

Spiritual Reading

OUR ETERNAL SALVATION IS IN PRAYER.

Prayer is not only *useful*, but *necessary* for salvation; and therefore God, Who desires that we should be saved, has enjoined it as a precept: *Ask, and it shall be given you* (Matt. vii. 7). It was an error of Wickliff, condemned by the Council of Constance, to say that prayer was only a Divine *counsel* to us and not a command. *It is necessary* -- not it is advisable or fitting -- *always to pray* (Luke xviii. 1). Wherefore Doctors of the Church always maintain that he cannot be held guiltless of grievous sin who neglects to recommend himself to God, at least once in a month, and at all times when he finds himself assailed by severe temptation.

The reason of this necessity of recommending ourselves often to God arises from our inability to do any good work, or to entertain any good thoughts, of ourselves: *Without me ye can do nothing* (Jo. xv. 5). *We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves* (2 Cor. iii. 5). Therefore, St. Philip Neri says that he despaired of *himself*. On the other hand, St. Augustine writes that God desires to bestow His graces, but only on those who beg them. And especially, said the Saint, as God gives the grace of perseverance only to those who seek it.

It is a fact that the devil never ceases to go about seeking to devour us, and therefore we need ever to defend ourselves by prayer. "Continual prayer is necessary for man," says St. Thomas. Jesus Christ first taught us: *We must always pray, and not faint* (Luke xviii. 1). Otherwise, how can we resist the constant temptations of the world and the devil? It was the error of Jansenius, condemned by the Church, that the observance of certain precepts was impossible, and that sometimes grace itself failed to render it possible to us. God is faithful, says St. Paul, Who does

not suffer us to be tempted above our strength. Yet He desires that, when we are tried, we should have recourse to Him for help to resist. St. Augustine writes: "The law is given, that grace may be sought; grace is given that the law may be fulfilled." Granting that the law cannot be fulfilled by us without grace, God has yet given us the law, in order that we may seek the grace to fulfil it; and, therefore, He gives grace that we may fulfil it. All this was well expressed by the Council of Trent in these words: "God does not command things that are impossible, but, in commanding, He counsels thee both to do what thou canst, and seek for aid for what thou canst not do, and He helps thee that thou mayst be able to do it."

Thus the Lord is ever ready to give His help, in order that we may not be overcome by temptation; but He gives this help only to those who fly to Him in the time of trial, and especially in temptations against chastity, as the Wise Man wrote: *And as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, and this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was, I went to the Lord and besought him* (Wis. viii. 21). Let us rest assured that we can never overcome our carnal appetites if God does not give us help, and we cannot have this help without prayer; but if we pray we shall assuredly have power to overcome the devil in everything, through the grace with which God will strengthen us; as St. Paul says: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13).

It is also most useful to us, in order to obtain divine grace, to have recourse to the intercession of the Saints, who have great power with God, especially for the benefit of those who have a particular devotion to them. This is not a mere devotion dependent upon our private fancy, but it is a duty; for St. Thomas says that the Divine law requires that we mortals should receive the aid which is necessary for our salvation, through the prayers of the Saints. This aid comes especially through the intercession of Mary, whose prayers are of more value than those of all the Saints. So true is this that St. Bernard says it is through her intercession that we have access to Jesus Christ our Mediator and Saviour. "Through thee we have access to the Son, O thou giver of grace, and Mother of our salvation, that through thee He may

receive us, Who through thee was given to us." This, indeed, I have sufficiently proved in my book called *The Glories of Mary* (Pt. I. Ch. 5), and also in my work *On Prayer*, in which I have brought forward the opinion of many Saints, especially St. Bernard, and of many Theologians, that through Mary we receive all the graces which we receive from God. Hence St. Bernard says: "Let us seek for grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for he that seeks finds, and cannot be disappointed." The same was said by St. Peter Damian, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. Antoninus, and others.

Let us, then, pray, and pray with confidence, says the Apostle. Let us go confidently to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Jesus Christ now sits on the throne of grace to comfort all who fly to Him, and says: *Ask, and it shall be given to you.* On the Day of Judgment He will also sit upon His throne, but it will be a throne of Judgment. What madness, then, it is in those who, having it in their power to be delivered from their miseries by going to Jesus, now that He sits on His throne of grace, wait till He becomes their Judge, and will not avail themselves of His mercy. He says to us that whatever we ask of Him, if we have confidence, He will give us. And what more can one friend do to another to show his love than say: "Ask what thou wilt, and I will give it thee." St. James goes further and says: *If any of you need wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men abundantly and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him* (James i. 5). By "wisdom" is here meant the knowledge of the salvation of the soul. To have this "wisdom" we must seek of God the graces necessary to bring us to salvation. And will God give them? Most assuredly He will give them, and in still greater abundance than we ask them. Let us observe also the words: *Upbraideth not.* If the sinner repents of his sins, and asks salvation from God, God does not that which men do, that is, reproach the ungrateful with their ingratitude, and deny them what they ask; but He gives to them willingly, and even more than they beg for. If, then, we would be saved, we must have our lips ever open in prayer, and say: *My God, help me! My God have mercy! Mary, have mercy!* If we cease to pray, we are lost. Let us pray for ourselves: let us pray for sinners, for this is most pleasing to God. Let us

also pray daily for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Those holy Prisoners are most grateful to all who pray for them.

Whenever we pray, let us seek the grace of God through the merits of Jesus Christ, for He Himself assures us that He will give whatever we ask in His Name.

O my God, this is the grace which, above all others, I ask through the merits of Jesus Christ: grant that throughout my life, and especially in time of temptation, I may recommend myself to Thee, and hope for Thy help through the love of Jesus and Mary. O holy Virgin, obtain for me this grace on which depends my salvation.

Evening Meditation

THE SOLITUDE OF JESUS IN THE STABLE

I.

Jesus chose at His birth the stable of Bethlehem for His hermitage and oratory; and for this purpose He so disposed events as to be born outside the city in a solitary cave, in order to commend to us the love of solitude and silence. Jesus remains in silence in the manger; Mary and Joseph adore and contemplate Him in silence. It was revealed to Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, a Discalced Carmelite, who was called the "Spouse of the Infant Jesus," that all that passed in the Cave of Bethlehem, even the visit of the shepherds and the adoration of the holy Magi, took place in silence, and without a word.

Silence in other infants is due to helplessness; but in Jesus Christ it was virtue. The Infant Jesus does not speak, but oh! how eloquent is His silence! Oh, blessed is he that converses with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in this holy solitude of the manger! The shepherds, though admitted there but for a very short time, came out from the stable all inflamed with the love of God; for they did nothing but praise and bless Him: *They returned glorifying and praising God* (Luke ii. 20). Oh, happy is the soul that shuts itself up in the solitude of Bethlehem to contemplate the divine mercy, and the love that God has borne, and still bears, to men! *I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart* (Os. ii. 14). There the divine Infant will speak, not to the ear, but to the heart, inviting the soul to love a God Who has loved her so much. When we see there the poverty of this wandering little

Hermit, Who remains in that cold cave, without fire, with a manger for a cradle, and a little Straw for a bed; when we hear the cries, and behold the tears of this innocent Child, and consider that He is our God -- how is it possible to think of anything but of loving Him! Oh, what a sweet hermitage for a soul that has Faith is the stable of Bethlehem!

My dearest Saviour, Thou art the King of Heaven, the King of kings, the Son of God; and how is it that I see Thee in this cave, forsaken by all? I see no one assisting Thee but Joseph and Thy holy Mother. I desire to unite myself to them in keeping Thee company. Do not reject me. I do not deserve it, but I feel that Thou dost invite me, by Thy sweet voice speaking to my heart. Yes, I come, O my beloved Infant! I will leave all things to pass my whole life alone with Thee, my dear little Hermit, the only Love of my soul. Fool that I was, to have hitherto forsaken Thee and left Thee alone, O my Jesus, whilst I was seeking miserable and empoisoned pleasures from creatures; but now, enlightened by Thy grace, I desire nothing but to live in solitude with Thee, Who didst Thyself will to live in solitude on this earth: *Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?* (Ps. liv. 7).

II.

Let us also imitate Mary and Joseph, who, burning with love, remain contemplating the great Son of God clothed in flesh, and made subject to earthly miseries -- Wisdom become an Infant that cannot speak -- the Great One become little -- the Supreme One become so abased -- the rich One become so poor -- the Omnipotent so weak. In short, let us meditate on the Divine Majesty shrouded beneath the form of a little Infant, despised and forsaken by the world, Who does and suffers everything in order to make Himself loved by men; and let us beseech Him to admit us into this sacred retreat -- there to stop, there to remain, and never to leave it again. "O solitude," says St. Jerome, "in which God speaks and converses familiarly with His servants." O beautiful solitude, in which God speaks and converses with His chosen souls, not as a sovereign, but as a friend, as a brother, as a spouse! Oh, what a paradise it is to converse alone with the Infant Jesus in the little grotto of Bethlehem!

Ah, who will enable me to fly from this world, where I have so often found my ruin -- to fly, and to come and remain always with Thee, Who art the joy of Paradise and the true Lover of my soul? Oh, bind me, I pray Thee, to Thy feet, so that I may no longer be separated from Thee, but may find my happiness in continually remaining in Thy company! Ah, by the merits of Thy solitude in the Cave of Bethlehem, give me a constant interior recollection, so that my soul may become a solitary little cell, where I may attend to nothing but to conversing with Thee; where I may take counsel with Thee in all my thoughts and actions; where I may dedicate to Thee all my affections; where I may always love Thee, and sigh to leave the prison of this body to come and love Thee face to face in Heaven. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I hope always to love Thee, in time and in eternity. O Mary, thou who canst do all things, pray to Jesus to enchain me with His love, and not to permit me ever again to lose His grace.

The Feast of the Epiphany

(January 6th)

Morning Meditation

THEY FOUND THE CHILD WITH MARY, HIS MOTHER.

They found the child with Mary, his mother (Matt. ii. 11). The kings find a poor Maiden, and her poor Infant wrapped in poor swaddling-clothes, and not one to attend on Him or assist Him. They adore, they acknowledge Him for their God, and, kissing His feet, they offer Him their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Let us adore our little King, and offer Him all our hearts.

I.

The Son of God is born humble and poor in a stable. There indeed the Angels of Heaven acknowledge Him, singing: *Glory to God in the highest* (Luke ii. 14); but men on earth, for whose salvation Jesus is born, leave Him neglected: only a few shepherds come and acknowledge Him, and confess Him to be their Saviour. But our loving Redeemer desires from the very beginning to communicate to us the grace of Redemption, and therefore He begins to make Himself known even to the Gentiles, who nei-

ther knew Him nor looked for His coming. For this purpose He sends the star to give notice to the holy Magi, enlightening them at the same time with interior light, in order that they may come to acknowledge and adore their Redeemer. This was the first and sovereign grace bestowed upon us; our call to the true Faith.

O Saviour of the world, what would have happened us if Thou hadst not come to enlighten us? We should be like our forefathers, who worshipped as gods, animals, stones, and wood, and consequently we should have all been damned. I give Thee thanks today on behalf of all men.

II.

Behold, the Magi without delay set out on their journey; and led by the star they arrive at the place where the Holy Infant is lying: *They found the child with Mary his mother* (Matt. ii. 11). They find there only a poor Maiden, and a poor Infant wrapped in poor swaddling-clothes. But on entering into that abode, a stable for beasts, they feel an interior joy, and their hearts are drawn towards this sweet Infant. The straw, the poverty, those cries of the Infant Saviour, are all darts of love and fire to their enlightened hearts.

The Infant looks upon these holy pilgrims with a joyful countenance, and thus shows that He accepts these first-fruits of His Redemption. The divine Mother is also silent, but welcomes them with her smiling looks, and thanks them for the homage done to her Son. They adore Him also in silence, and acknowledge Him for their Saviour and their God, offering Him gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Yes, my Infant Jesus, the more humbled and poor I behold Thee, the more dost Thou inflame me with Thy love.

O Jesus, my Infant King! I also adore Thee, and offer Thee my miserable heart. Accept it and change it. Make it wholly Thine own, so that it may love nothing but Thee. My sweet Saviour, save me, and let my eternal happiness be to love Thee always and without reserve. O Mary, most holy Virgin, I hope for this grace from thee.

Spiritual Reading

"LO, HERE AM I, SEND ME!"

The Eternal Word became Man in order to inflame us with His divine love. Adam, our first parent, sinned. Ungrateful for the benefits bestowed upon him, he rebelled against God by a violation of the precept given him not to eat of the forbidden fruit. On this account God is obliged to drive him out of the earthly paradise in this world, and in the world to come to deprive not only Adam, but all the descendants of this rebellious creature, of the heavenly and everlasting Paradise which He had prepared for them after this mortal life.

Behold, then, all mankind together condemned to a life of pain and misery, and forever shut out from Heaven. But hearken to God, Who, as Isaias tells us, would seem, after our manner of understanding, to give vent to His affliction in lamentations: *And now what have I here, saith the Lord, for my people is taken away gratis* (Is. lii. 5). "And now," says God, "what delight have I left in Heaven, now that I have lost men who were My delight?" *My delights were to be with the children of men* (Prov. viii. 31).

But how is this, O Lord? Thou hast in Heaven so many Seraphim, so many Angels; and canst Thou thus take to heart having lost men? Indeed, what need hast Thou of Angels or of men to fill up the sum of Thy happiness? Thou hast always been, and Thou art in Thyself, most happy; what can ever be wanting to Thy bliss, which is infinite? "That is all true," says God, "but" (and these are the words of Cardinal Hugo on the above text of Isaias) -- "but, losing man, I deem that I have nothing." I consider that I have lost all, since My delights were to be with men; and now I have lost these men, and, poor hapless creatures, they are doomed to live forever far away from Me.

But how can the Lord call men His delight? Yes, indeed, writes St. Thomas, God loves man just as if man were His God, and as if without man He could not be happy; "as if man were the God of God Himself, and without him He could not be happy." St. Gregory of Nazianzen adds, moreover, that God, for the love He bears to men, seems beside Himself: "we are bold to say it, God is out of Himself by reason of His immense love." So runs the proverb: "Love puts the lover beside himself."

And here St. Bernard, in his contemplations on this subject, imagines a struggle to ensue between the *Justice* and *Mercy* of God. *Justice* says: "I perish if Adam die not." *Mercy*, on the other hand, says: "I perish if he does not obtain forgiveness." In this contest the Lord decides, that in order to deliver man, who was guilty of death, some innocent one must die "Let one die who is no debtor to death."

On earth, there was not one innocent. "Since, therefore," says the Eternal Father, "amongst men there is none can satisfy My Justice, let Him come forward Who will go to redeem man." The Angels, the Cherubim, the Seraphim -- all are silent; not one replies. One voice alone is heard, that of the Eternal Word, Who says: *Lo, here am I; send me* (Is. vi. 8). "Father," says the Only-Begotten Son, "Thy Majesty, being infinite, and having been injured by man, cannot be fittingly satisfied by an Angel, who is merely a creature; and though Thou mightest accept of the satisfaction of an Angel, reflect that, in spite of so great benefits bestowed on man, in spite of so many promises and threats, We have not yet been able to gain his love, because he is not yet aware of the love We bear him. If We would oblige him to love Us, what better occasion can we find than that, in order to redeem him, I, Thy Son, should go upon earth, should there assume human flesh, and pay by my death the penalty due by him. In this manner Thy justice is fully satisfied, and at the same time man is fully convinced of Our love!" "But think," answered the Heavenly Father -- "think, O My Son, that in taking upon Thyself the burden of man's satisfaction, Thou wilt have to lead a life full of sufferings!" "It matters not," replied the Son: *Lo, here am I, send me*. "Think that Thou wilt have to be born in a cave, the shelter of the beasts of the field; thence Thou must flee into Egypt whilst still an Infant, to escape the hands of those very men who, even from Thy tenderest Infancy, will seek to take away Thy life." "It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me*." "Think that, on Thy return to Palestine, Thou shalt there lead a life most arduous, most despicable, passing Thy days as a simple boy in a carpenter's shop." "It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me*." "Think that when Thou goest forth to preach and to manifest Thyself, Thou wilt have indeed a few, but very few, to follow

Thee; the greater part will despise Thee and call Thee impostor, magician, fool, Samaritan; and finally, they will persecute Thee to such a pass that they will make Thee die shamefully on a gibbet by dint of torments." "It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me.*"

So, then, for us miserable worms, and to captivate our love, has a God deigned to become Man? Yes, it is of Faith; as the Holy Church teaches us: *For us men, and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven ... and was made Man* (Nicene Creed). Yes, indeed, so much has God done in order to be loved by us.

Evening Meditation

HAPPINESS OF HAVING BEEN BORN AFTER THE REDEMPTION AND IN THE TRUE CHURCH

I.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son ... that he might redeem them who were under the law. (Gal. iv. 4).

How thankful should we not be to Almighty God for having caused us to be born after the great work of man's redemption was accomplished! This is what is meant by the *fulness of time*, a time blessed by the fulness of grace, which Jesus Christ obtained for us by coming into the world. Miserable should we have been if, guilty as we are of manifold sins, we had lived on this earth before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Oh, in what miserable state were all men before the coming of the Messias; the true God was hardly known even in Judea, and in every other part of the world idolatry reigned, so that our forefathers worshipped stones, and wood, and devils; they worshipped innumerable false gods, but the true God was neither loved nor known by them. Even now, how many countries are there in which there are scarcely any Catholics, and all the rest of the inhabitants are either infidels or heretics, and all these are certainly in the way to be lost! What obligation do we not owe God for causing us to be born, not only after the coming of Jesus Christ, but also in countries where the true Faith reigns!

I thank Thee, O Lord, for this. Woe to me if, after so many transgressions, it had been my lot to live in the midst of infidels and heretics! I know, O my God, that Thou willest that I should be saved; and I, miserable wretch, have willed so many times to damn myself by losing Thy favour. Have pity, my Blessed Re-

deemer, on my soul, which has cost Thee so much.

II.

God sent his son that he might redeem them that were under the law (Gal. iv. 4). The slave therefore sins, and by sinning gives himself over to the power of the devil, and his own Lord comes and ransoms him by His death.

O immense love, O infinite love of God towards man! O My Saviour, if Thou hadst not redeemed me by Thy death, what would have become of me? Of me, who so many times have deserved hell by my sins. Oh, if Thou, my Jesus, hadst not died for me, I should have lost Thee forever, and there would have been no hope for me of recovering Thy grace, or of seeing Thy beautiful face in Paradise. My dearest Saviour, I thank Thee; and I hope to come to Heaven, there to thank Thee for all eternity. I regret above every evil that of having despised Thee in times past. In future, I purpose to choose every suffering, every kind of death, rather than offend Thee. I beseech Thee, my Jesus, let me never do so again. Never let me be separated from Thee, never let me be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I will always love Thee in this life, and for all eternity. O my Queen and advocate Mary, keep me always under thy protection, and deliver me from sin.

The Presentation in the Temple

(January 7th)

Morning Meditation

PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

He delivered himself ... an oblation and a sacrifice to God (Eph. v. 2).

If Jesus offers His life to His Father for the love of us, it is just that we should offer Him our life and our entire being. This is what He desires, as He signified to the Blessed Angela de Foligno, saying to her: "I have offered Myself for thee, in order that thou shouldst offer thyself to Me."

I.

The time having now come when, according to the Law, Mary had to go to the Temple for her purification, and to present Jesus to the Divine Father, behold she sets out in company

with Joseph. Joseph carries the two turtle doves they are to offer to God; and Mary carries her dear Infant: she takes the Lamb of God to offer Him to the Almighty, in token of the great Sacrifice that this Son would one day accomplish on the Cross.

Consider the holy Virgin entering the Temple; she makes an oblation of her Son on behalf of the whole human race, and says: Behold, O Eternal Father, Thy beloved Only-Begotten One, Who is Thy Son and mine also; I offer Him to Thee as a Victim to Thy divine justice, in order to appease Thy wrath against sinners. Accept Him, O God of mercy! Have pity on our miseries; and for the love of this immaculate Lamb do Thou receive men into Thy grace.

Eternal Father, I, a miserable sinner, who have deserved a thousand hells, present myself this day before Thee, O God of infinite Majesty, and I offer Thee my poor heart. But, O God, what a heart I offer Thee -- a heart that has never known how to love Thee, but has, on the contrary, so often offended Thee and so often betrayed Thee! But now I offer it to Thee full of penitence, and resolved to love Thee at all costs and to obey Thee in all things. Pardon me, and draw me entirely to Thy love. I do not deserve to be heard; but Thy Infant Son, Who offers Himself to Thee in the Temple as a Sacrifice for my salvation, merits for me this grace. I offer Thee this Thy Son and His Sacrifice, and in this I place all my hopes.

II.

The offering of Mary is joined to that of Jesus. Behold Me, (says the Holy Infant), behold Me, O My Father; to Thee do I consecrate My whole life; Thou hast sent Me into the world to save it by My Blood; behold My Blood and My whole self. I offer Myself entirely to Thee for the salvation of the world. *He delivered himself... an oblation and a sacrifice to God.*

No sacrifice was ever so acceptable to God as this which His dear Son then made -- Who had become, even from His infancy, a Victim and Priest. If all men and Angels had offered their lives, their oblations would not have been so pleasing to God as this of Jesus Christ, because in this offering alone the Eternal Father received infinite honour and infinite satisfaction.

I thank Thee, O my Father, for having sent Thy Son upon

the earth to sacrifice Himself for me. And I bless Thee, O Incarnate Word, Lamb of God, Who didst offer Thyself to die for my soul. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, and Thee alone will I love; for I find none but Thee Who has offered and sacrificed His life to save me. It makes me shed tears to think how ungrateful I have been to Thee; but Thou willest not my death, but that I should be converted and live. Yes, my Jesus, I turn to Thee, and repent with my whole heart of having offended Thee, of having offended the great God, Who has sacrificed Himself for me. Do Thou give me life, and life shall then be spent in loving Thee, the sovereign Good; make me love Thee, I ask Thee nothing more. Mary, my Mother, thou didst offer thy Son in the Temple even for me; do thou offer Him again for me, and beseech the Eternal Father to accept me for His own, for the love of Jesus. And thou, my Queen, do thou also accept me for thy faithful servant. If I am thy servant, I shall also be the servant of thy Son.

Spiritual Reading

ST. SIMEON'S PROPHECY

In this valley of tears every man is born to weep, and all must suffer by enduring the evils which are of daily occurrence. But how much greater would the misery of life be, did we also know the future evils which await us! "Unfortunate, indeed, would his lot be," says Seneca, "who, knowing the future, would have to suffer all by anticipation."

The Lord shows us this mercy -- He conceals the trials that await us, that, whatever they may be, we may endure them but once. He did not show Mary this compassion; for she, whom God willed to be the Queen of Sorrows, and in all things like His Son, had always before her eyes, and continually suffered, all the torments that awaited her; and these were the sufferings of the Passion and Death of her beloved Jesus; for in the Temple, St. Simeon, having received the Divine Child into his arms, foretold to her that her Son would be a mark for all the persecutions and opposition of men. *Behold, this child is set ... for a sign which shall be contradicted.* And, therefore, that a sword of sorrow should pierce her soul. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke ii. 34, 35).

The Blessed Virgin herself told St. Matilda, that, on this announcement of St. Simeon, "all her joy was changed into

sorrow." For, as it was revealed to St. Teresa, though the Blessed Mother already knew that the life of her Son would be sacrificed for the salvation of the world, yet she then learnt more distinctly and in greater detail the sufferings and cruel death that awaited her poor Son. She knew He would be contradicted, and contradicted in everything -- contradicted in His doctrines; for, instead of being believed, He would be esteemed a blasphemer for teaching that He was the Son of God. This He was declared to be by the impious Caiphas, saying: *He hath blasphemed, he is guilty of death* (Matt. xxvi. 65). He was Wisdom itself and was treated as ignorant: *How doth this man know letters, having never learned?* (Jo. vii. 15). As a false prophet: *And they blindfolded him, and smote his face ... saying: Prophecy, who is it that struck thee?* (Luke xxii. 64). He was treated as a madman: *He is mad, why hear you him* (Jo. x. 20). As a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners: *Behold the man that is a glutton, and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners* (Luke vii. 34). As a sorcerer: *By the prince of devils he casteth out devils* (Matt. ix. 34). As a heretic, and possessed by the evil spirit: *Do we not say well of thee that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?* (Jo. viii. 48). In a word, Jesus was considered so notoriously wicked, that, as the Jews said to Pilate, no trial was necessary to condemn Him. *If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee* (Jo. xviii. 30). He was contradicted in His very soul; for even His Eternal Father, to give place to divine justice, contradicted Him, by refusing to hear His prayer, when He said: *Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me* (Matt. xxvi. 39); and abandoned Him to fear, weariness, and sadness; so that our afflicted Lord exclaimed: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death!* (Ib. 38); and His interior sufferings even caused Him to sweat Blood. Contradicted and persecuted, in fine, in all His body and all through His life; for He was tortured in all His sacred members, in His hands, His feet, His face, His head, and His whole body; so that, drained of His Blood, and an object of scorn, He died of torments on an ignominious Cross.

When David, in the midst of all his pleasures and regal grandeur, heard from the Prophet Nathan, that his son should die -- *The child that is born to thee shall surely die* (2 Kings xii. 14), he could find no peace, but wept, fasted, and slept on the ground.

Mary with the greatest calmness received the announcement that her Son should die, and always peacefully submitted to it; but what grief must she continually have suffered, seeing this amiable Son always near her, hearing from Him words of eternal life, and witnessing His holy demeanour!

Abraham suffered much during the three days he passed with his beloved Isaac, after knowing that he was to lose him. O God, not for three days, but for three and thirty years had Mary to endure a like sorrow! But do I say a like sorrow? It was as much greater as the Son of Mary was more lovely than the son of Abraham.

Evening Meditation

THE FIRST SWORD OF SORROW (First Dolour)

I.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to St. Bridget, that while on earth, there was not an hour in which grief did not pierce her soul: "as often," she continued, "as I wrapped my Son in His swaddling-clothes, as often as I saw His hands and feet, so often was my soul absorbed, so to say, in fresh grief; for I thought how He would be crucified."

The Abbot Rupert contemplates Mary suckling her Son, and thus addressing Him: *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall abide between my breasts* (Cant. i. 12). Ah, Son, I clasp Thee in my arms, because Thou art so dear to me; but the dearer Thou art to me, the more dost Thou become a bundle of myrrh and sorrow to me when I think of Thy sufferings. "Mary," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "reflected that the Strength of the Saints was to be reduced to agony; the Beauty of Paradise to be disfigured; the Lord of the world to be bound as a criminal; the Creator of all things to be made livid with blows; the Judge of all to be condemned; the Glory of Heaven despised; the King of kings to be crowned with thorns, and treated as a mock king."

It was revealed to the same St. Bridget, that the afflicted Mother, already knowing what her Son was to suffer, "when suckling Him, thought of the gall and vinegar; when swathing Him, of the cords with which He was to be bound; when bearing Him in her arms, of the Cross to which He was to be nailed; when sleeping, of His death." As often as she put on His gar-

ment, she reflected that one day it would be torn from Him, that He might be crucified; and when she beheld His sacred hands and feet, she thought of the nails which would one day pierce them; and then, as Mary said to St. Bridget, "my eyes filled with tears, and my heart was tortured with grief."

I pity thee, O afflicted Mother, on account of the first Sword of Sorrow that pierced thee, when, in the Temple, all the outrages which men would inflict on thy beloved Jesus, were made known to thee by St. Simeon, and which thou already knewest from the Sacred Scriptures; outrages which were to cause Him to die before thine eyes, on that infamous Cross, exhausted of His Blood, abandoned by all, and thyself unable to defend or help Him. By that bitter knowledge, then, which for so many years afflicted thy heart, I beseech thee, my Queen, to obtain for me the grace that during my life and at my death I may ever keep the Passion of Jesus and Thy sorrows impressed on my heart.

II.

The Evangelist says that as Jesus Christ advanced in years, so also did He *advance in wisdom and in grace with God and men* (Luke ii. 32). This is to be understood as St. Thomas explains it -- that He advanced in wisdom and grace in the estimation of men and before God, inasmuch as all His works would continually have availed to increase His merit, had not grace been conferred upon Him from the beginning, in its complete fullness, by virtue of the hypostatic union. But, since Jesus advanced in the love and esteem of others, how much more must He have advanced in that of Mary! And, O God, as love increased in her, so much the more did her grief increase at the thought of having to lose Him by so cruel a death; and the nearer the time of the Passion of her Son approached, so much the deeper did that Sword of Sorrow, foretold by St. Simeon, pierce the heart of His Mother. This was precisely revealed by the Angel to St. Bridget, saying: That Sword of Sorrow was every hour approaching nearer to the Blessed Virgin, as the time of the Passion of her Son drew near."

Since, then, Jesus our King, and His most holy Mother, did not refuse, for love of us, to suffer such cruel pains throughout their lives, it is reasonable that we at least should not complain

if we have to suffer something. Jesus, crucified, once appeared to Sister Magdalen Orsini, a Dominicaness, who had long been suffering under a great trial, and encouraged her to remain, by means of that affliction, with Him on the Cross. Sister Magdalen complainingly answered: "O Lord, Thou wast tortured on the Cross only for *three hours*, and I have endured my pain for many years." The Redeemer then replied: "Ah, ignorant soul, what dost thou say? From the first moment of My conception I suffered in Heart all that I afterwards endured dying on the Cross." If, then, when we suffer we also complain, let us imagine Jesus and His Mother Mary addressing the same words to ourselves.

Ah, my Blessed Mother, it is not one sword only with which I have pierced thy heart, but I have done so with as many as are the sins which I have committed. Ah, Lady, it is not to thee, who art innocent, that sufferings are due, but to me who am guilty of so many crimes. But since thou hast been pleased to suffer so much for me, ah, by thy merits, obtain me great sorrow for my sins, and patience under the trials of this life, which will always be light in comparison with my demerits, for I have often deserved hell.

The Flight into Egypt

Morning Meditation

"THEY SEEK THE CHILD TO DESTROY HIM."

Arise! and take the Child and his mother and fly into Egypt (Matt. ii. 13).

Behold, Jesus is no sooner born than He is persecuted unto death. Herod is a figure of those miserable sinners who, as soon as they see Jesus Christ born again in their souls by the pardon of their sins, persecute Him unto death by returning to their sins, for they *seek the Child to destroy him* (Ibid.).

I.

The Angel appeared to St. Joseph in a dream, and informed him that Herod was seeking the Infant Jesus to destroy His life; wherefore he said: *Arise, and take the Child and his mother and fly into Egypt*. Behold, then, how Jesus is no sooner born than He is persecuted unto death. Herod is a figure of those miserable sinners who, as soon as they see Jesus Christ born again in their

souls by the pardon of sin, persecute Him unto death by returning to their sins: *for they seek the Child to destroy him.*

Joseph immediately obeys the command of the Angel, and gives notice of it to his holy spouse. He then takes the few tools that he can carry, in order to make use of them in his trade, and to be able in Egypt to support his poor family. Mary at the same time puts together a little bundle of clothes for the use of the holy Child; and then she goes into her cell, kneels down first before her Infant Son, kisses His feet, and with tears of tenderness says to Him: O my Son and my God, hardly art Thou born and come into the world to save men, than these men seek Thee to put Thee to death! She then takes Him; and the two holy spouses, shedding tears as they go, at once set out on their journey.

My dear Jesus, Thou art the King of Heaven, but now I behold Thee as an Infant wandering over the earth; tell me whom dost Thou seek? I pity Thee when I see Thee so poor and humbled; but I pity Thee more when I see Thee treated with such ingratitude by the same men whom Thou camest to save. Thou dost weep; but I also weep, because I have been one of those who in times past have despised and persecuted Thee. But now I value Thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world; forgive me, O my Jesus, all the evil I have committed against Thee, and permit me to carry Thee always in my heart during the journey of my life to eternity, even as Mary carried Thee in her arms during the flight into Egypt.

II.

Let us consider the occupation of these holy Pilgrims during their journey. All their conversation is upon their dear Jesus alone, on His patience and His love; and thus they console each other in the midst of the trials and sufferings of so long a journey. Oh, how sweet it is to suffer at the sight of Jesus suffering! "O my soul," says St. Bonaventure, "do thou also keep company with these three poor holy Exiles, and have compassion on them in the long, wearisome, and painful journey which they are making. And beseech Mary that she will give her divine Son to me to carry in my heart."

Consider how much they must have suffered, especially in those nights which they had to pass in the desert of Egypt. The

bare earth serves them for a bed in the cold open air. The Infant weeps; Mary and Joseph shed tears of compassion. O Holy Faith! who would not weep at seeing the Son of God become an Infant, poor and forsaken, flying across a desert in order to escape death?

My beloved Redeemer, I have many times driven Thee out of my soul; but now I hope that Thou hast again taken possession of it. I beseech Thee, do Thou bind it to Thyself with the sweet chains of Thy love. I will never again drive Thee from me. But I fear lest I should again abandon Thee, as I have done in times past. O my Lord! let me die rather than treat Thee with fresh and still more horrible ingratitude. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness; and I will always repeat, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee; and so I hope to die saying: *God of my heart, and the God that art my portion forever* (Ps. lxxii. 26). O my Jesus! Thou art so good, so worthy of being loved, oh, do Thou make Thyself loved; make Thyself loved by all the sinners who persecute Thee; give them light, make them know the love Thou hast borne them and the love Thou deservest since Thou goest wandering over the earth as a poor Infant, weeping and trembling with cold, and seeking souls to love Thee! O Mary, most holy Virgin, O dearest Mother and companion of the sufferings of Jesus, do thou help me always to carry and preserve thy Son in my heart, in life and in death!

Spiritual Reading

THE SECOND SWORD OF SORROW (Second Dolour)

As the stag, wounded by an arrow, carries the pain with him wherever he goes, because he carries with him the arrow which has wounded him, so did the divine Mother, after the sad Prophecy of St. Simeon, as we have already seen, always carry her sorrow with her in the continual remembrance of the Passion of her Son. Hailgrino, explaining this passage of the Canticles: *The hairs of thy head, as the purple of the king* (Cant. vii. 5) -- says that these purple hairs were Mary's continual thoughts of the Passion of Jesus, which kept the Blood which was one day to flow from His wounds always before her eyes: "Thy mind, O Mary, and thy thoughts, steeped in the Blood of our Lord's Passion, were always filled with sorrow, as if they actually beheld the Blood

flowing from His wounds." Thus her Son Himself was that arrow in the heart of Mary; and the more amiable He appeared to her, so much the more deeply did the thought of losing Him by so cruel a death wound her heart.

Now Herod having heard that the expected Messiah was born, foolishly feared that He would deprive him of his kingdom. Hence St. Fulgentius, reproving him for his folly, thus addresses him: "Why art thou troubled, O Herod? This King Who is born comes not to conquer by the sword, but to subjugate men wonderfully by His death." The impious Herod, therefore, waited to hear from the holy Magi where the King was born, that he might take His life; but finding himself deceived, he ordered all the infants found in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem to be put to death. Then it was that the Angel appeared in a dream to St. Joseph, and commanded him to *arise, and take the Child and his mother, and fly into Egypt* (Matt. ii. 13). According to Gerson, St. Joseph immediately, on that very night, made the order known to Mary; and taking the Infant Jesus, they set out on their journey, as it is sufficiently evident from the Gospel itself: *Who arose and took the Child and his mother, by night, and retired into Egypt* (Ibid. ii. 14).

O God, says Blessed Albert the Great, in the name of Mary, "must He then fly from men Who came to save men!" Then the afflicted Mother knew that already the Prophecy of Simeon concerning her Son began to be verified: *He is set for a sign that shall be contradicted* (Luke ii. 34). Seeing that He was no sooner born than He was persecuted unto death, what anguish, writes St. John Chrysostom, must the intimation of that cruel exile of herself and her Son have caused in her heart: "Flee from thy friends to strangers, from God's temple to the temples of devils. What greater tribulation than that a new-born child, hanging on its mother's neck, and she, too, in poverty, should be forced to fly?"

Any one can imagine what Mary must have suffered on this journey. The distance to Egypt was great. Most authors agree that it was three hundred miles, so that it was a journey of upwards of thirty days. The road was, according to St. Bonaventure's description of it, "rough, unknown, and little frequented."

It was in the Winter season; so that they had to travel in snow, rain, and wind, over rough and dirty roads. Mary was then but fifteen years of age -- a delicate young maiden, unaccustomed to such journeys. They had no one to attend upon them. St. Peter Chrysologus says: "Joseph and Mary have no servants; they were themselves both masters and servants." O God, what a touching sight must it have been to behold that tender Virgin, with her new-born Babe in her arms, wandering through the world! "But how," asks St Bonaventure, "did they obtain their food? Where did they repose at night? How were they lodged?" What can they have eaten but a piece of hard bread, either brought by St. Joseph, or begged as an alms? Where can they have slept on such a road unless on the sand or under a tree in a wood, exposed to the cold and the dangers of robbers and wild beasts, with which Egypt abounded? Ah, had anyone met these three greatest Personages in the world, for what could he have taken them but for poor wandering beggars?

They resided in Egypt, according to Brocard and Jansenius, in a district called Maturea; though St. Anselm says that they lived in the city of Heliopolis, or at Memphis, now called Cairo. Here let us consider the great poverty they must have suffered during the seven years which, according to St. Antoninus, St. Thomas, and others, they spent in Egypt. They were foreigners, unknown, without revenue, money, or relatives, barely able to support themselves by their humble efforts. "As they were destitute," says St. Basil, "it is evident that they must have laboured much to provide themselves with the necessities of life." Landolph of Saxony has moreover written, and let this be a consolation for the poor, that "Mary lived there in the midst of such poverty that at times she had not even a little bread to give to her Son, when, urged by hunger, He asked for it."

The sight, then, of Jesus and Mary wandering as fugitives through the world, teaches us that we also must live as pilgrims here below; detached from the goods which this world offers us, and which we must soon leave to enter eternity: *We have not here a lasting city, but seek one that is to come* (Heb. xiii. 14). To which St. Augustine adds: "Thou art a guest: thou givest a look, and passest on." It also teaches us to embrace crosses, for without

them we cannot live in this world. Blessed Veronica de Binasco, an Augustinian nun, was carried in spirit to accompany Mary with the Infant Jesus on their journey into Egypt; and after it the divine Mother said: "Daughter, thou hast seen with how much difficulty we have reached this country. Now learn that no one receives graces without suffering." Whoever wishes to lighten the sufferings of this life must go in company with Jesus and Mary: *Take the Child and his mother*. All sufferings become light, and even sweet and desirable to him who by his love bears this Son and this Mother in his heart. Let us, then, love them; let us console Mary by welcoming in our hearts her Son, Whom men even now continue to persecute by their sins.

The most holy Virgin one day appeared to Blessed Colette, a Franciscan nun, and showed her the Infant Jesus torn to pieces, and said: "Thus it is that sinners continually treat my Son, renewing His death and my sorrows. My daughter, pray for them, that they may be converted." To this we may add another vision vouchsafed the Venerable Sister Joanna of Jesus and Mary, also a Franciscan nun. She was one day meditating on the Infant Jesus persecuted by Herod, when she heard a great noise, as of armed men pursuing some one; and immediately she saw before her a most beautiful Child, Who, all out of breath and running, exclaimed: "O my Joanna, help Me, conceal Me! I am Jesus of Nazareth; I am flying from sinners, who wish to kill Me and persecute Me as Herod did. Do thou save Me."

Thus, O Mary, even after thy Son has died by the hands of men who persecuted Him unto death, ungrateful sinners have not yet ceased persecuting Him by their sins, and continue to afflict Thee, O sorrowful Mother! And I, O my God, also have been one of these. Ah, my most sweet Mother, obtain me tears to weep over such ingratitude. By the sufferings thou didst endure in that journey to Egypt, assist me in the journey which I am now making to eternity; that I may at length be united to thee in loving my persecuted Saviour in the Kingdom of the Blessed. Amen.

Evening Meditation

MAN IS A TRAVELLER ON EARTH.

I.

Seeing that on this earth so many miscreants live in prosperity, and so many Saints live in tribulations, the very Gentiles, by the sole aid of the light of nature, came to this conclusion -- that, as there is a just God, there must be another life in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. But what the Gentiles learned by the light of reason, we Christians know by the light of Faith. *We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come* (Heb. xiii. 14). This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. *Man shall go into the house of his eternity* (Eccles. xii. 5). The house, then, dear reader, which you inhabit is not your home; it is a hospital, from which you will soon, and when you least expect, be dislodged. Remember that when the time of death has arrived, your dearest relatives will be the first to banish you from it; and what will be your true home? The home of your body will be a grave, in which it will remain till the day of Judgment; but your soul will go to *the house of eternity* -- either to Heaven or to hell. St. Augustine tells you that you are a stranger, a traveller, a spectator. It would be foolishness in a traveller to spend all his patrimony in purchasing a villa, or a house in a country through which he is merely passing, and which he must leave in a few days. Reflect, says the Saint, that in this world you are only on a journey; fix not your affections on what you see; look and pass on, and labour to procure a good house, in which you will have to dwell forever.

Behold, then, O Lord, the home which I have deserved by the life I led. Alas! it is hell, in which, from the first sin I have committed, I ought to dwell, abandoned by Thee, and without having it ever in my power to love Thee. Blessed forever be Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now gives me time to repair the evil I have done. O my God, I will no longer abuse Thy patience. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, not so much because I have merited hell, as because I have outraged Thy infinite goodness. Never more, my God, never more will I rebel against Thee; I desire death rather than

offend Thee.

II.

Happy you, if you save your soul! Oh how delightful is Heaven! All the princely palaces of this world are but stables compared with the city of Paradise, which alone can be called the *city of perfect beauty*. There you will have nothing to desire; for you will be in the society of the Saints, of the divine Mother, and of Jesus Christ, and will be free from all fear of evil; in a word, you will live in a sea of delights, and in unceasing joy, which will last forever. *Everlasting joy shall be upon their head!* (Is. xxxv. 10). This joy shall be so great, that at every moment for all eternity it will appear new. But unhappy you, if you are lost! You will be confined in a sea of fire and of torments, in despair, abandoned by all, and without God. And for how long? Perhaps after the lapse of a hundred thousand years, your pains will have an end? A hundred and a thousand millions of years and ages will pass by, and your hell will always be at its commencement. What are a thousand years compared with eternity? Less than a day which is gone by. *A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past* (Ps. lxxxix. 4). Would you wish to know the house which will be your dwelling for eternity? It will be that which you merit, and which you choose for yourself by your works.

O my Sovereign Good! were I now in hell, I could never love Thee, nor couldst Thou love me. I love Thee, and wish to be loved by Thee; this I do not deserve, but Jesus merits it for me because He has offered Himself to Thee in sacrifice on the Cross, that Thou mightest be able to pardon and love me. Eternal Father, give me, then, for the sake of Thy Son, the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee with all my heart. I love Thee, O my Father, Who hast given me Thy Son. I love Thee, O Son of God, Who didst die for me. I love Thee, O Mother of Jesus! who, by thy intercession, hast obtained for me time for repentance. O Mary, obtain for me sorrow for my sins, the love of God, and holy perseverance.

January the Ninth

Morning Meditation

SALVATION ALONE IS NECESSARY.

The affair of eternal salvation is not only the *most important*, it is the *only affair* to which we have to attend in this life. Only one thing is necessary. If you save your soul, it will do you no harm to have lived here in poverty, afflictions and contempt.

I.

But one thing is necessary (Luke x. 42). It is not necessary that in this world we should be honoured with dignities, favoured with riches, with good health, and earthly pleasures; but it is necessary that we should be saved; for there is no middle course -- we must either be *saved* or be *damned*. After this short life, we shall be either eternally happy in Heaven, or eternally wretched in hell.

How many worldly persons there are who, loaded with riches and honours in this life, and lifted up to high positions, and even to thrones, now find themselves in hell, where all their fortune in this world serves only to increase their pains and their despair. This is what the Lord warned us of: *Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth destroy* (Matt. vi. 19). The acquisition of earthly goods perishes with death; but the acquisition of spiritual goods is an unrivalled treasure, and is eternal.

God has taught us that He wills the salvation of all, and to all He gives the power of being saved. Miserable is he who is lost; it is all his own doing: *Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me* (Osee xiii. 9). And this will be the greatest pain of the damned, the thought that they are lost through their own fault. Fire and the worm (that is, the remorse of conscience) will torture the damned in punishment for their sins, but the worm will forever torment them more terribly than the flame. How much pain do we not suffer through the loss of any object of value -- a diamond, a watch, a purse of money -- especially when this happens through our own carelessness! We cannot eat or sleep, for thinking of our loss, so long as there is hope of repairing it in some way or other. What, then, will be the torment of one who,

through his own fault, has lost God and Paradise, without a hope of ever recovering them!

O my God! what is it that will befall me? Shall I be lost? One lot or the other must be mine. I hope to be saved; but who shall assure me of it? I know that I have repeatedly deserved hell. Yes, my Saviour, Thy death is my hope.

II.

We have erred from the way (Wis. v. 6). The eternal complaint of the souls miserably damned will be: We have gone astray, destroying ourselves of our own accord, and there is no remedy for our error! In most of the misfortunes that occur to persons in this life, a remedy comes with time, or with a change of state, or, at least, through a holy resignation to the will of God. But none of these remedies will help us when we have reached eternity, if in this life we have wandered from the path to Heaven.

Therefore, the Apostle St. Paul exhorts us to labour for our eternal salvation with a continual fear of losing it: *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. ii. 12). This fear will cause us to walk with caution, and to avoid occasions of evil; it will aid us continually to recommend ourselves to God, and thus we shall be saved. Let us pray the Lord that He will fix this thought in our hearts -- that upon the life we lead in this world depends the question whether we shall be eternally blessed or eternally miserable without hope of remedy.

My God, many times have I despised Thy grace; I deserve no mercy, but Thy Prophet teaches me that Thou showest mercy to all who seek Thee. In the past I have fled from Thee; but now I seek nothing, I ask nothing, I love nothing but Thee. Do not despise me in Thy goodness. Remember the Blood Thou hast shed for me. This Blood, and thy intercession, O Mary, Mother of God, are my only hope.

Spiritual Reading

THE GREAT THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

St. Augustine called the thought of Eternity *the great thought* - *Magna cogitatio*. This thought has brought the Saints to count all the treasures and greatness of this life as nothing more than straw, dust, smoke, and refuse. This thought has sent anchorites to hide themselves in deserts and caves, noble youths, and even

kings and emperors, to shut themselves up in cloisters. This thought has given courage to Martyrs to endure the torture of piercing nails and heated irons, and even of being burnt in the fire.

No; we are created not for this earth: the end for which God has placed us in the world is -- that with our good deeds we may inherit eternal life. *The end is eternal life* (Rom. vi. 22). Therefore, St. Eucherius said that the only affair we should attend to in this life is Eternity; that is, win a happy Eternity, and escape a miserable one: the object for which we contend is Eternity. If assured of this end, we are forever blessed; if we fail in it, forever miserable.

Happy he who lives with Eternity ever in view, in a lively Faith that he must speedily die, and enter upon Eternity. *The just man lives by faith* (Gal. iii. 11). It is Faith that makes the just live in the sight of God, and which gives light to their souls, by withdrawing from them earthly affections, and placing before their thoughts the eternal blessings which God promises to them that love Him.

St. Teresa said that all sins had their origin in a want of Faith. Therefore in order to overcome our passions and temptations, we ought constantly to revive our Faith by saying: *I believe in life everlasting*. I believe that after this life, which will soon be ended, an eternal life awaits me, either full of joys, or full of pains, according to my merits or demerits.

St. Augustine says that the man who thinks of Eternity, and yet is not converted to God, has either lost his senses or his Faith. "O Eternity!" (these are his words), "he that meditates upon thee, and repents not, either has not Faith, or if he has Faith, he has no heart." In reference to this, St. John Chrysostom relates that the Gentiles, when they saw Christians sinning, thought them either liars or fools. If you believe not, they said, what you say you believe, you are liars; if you believe in Eternity and sin, you are fools. "Woe to sinners who enter upon Eternity without having known it, because they would not think upon it!" exclaims St. Caesarius; and then he adds: "But oh, double woe! They enter upon it and they never come forth."

St. Teresa used to say to her disciples: "My children, there is

one soul, one Eternity!" By which she meant: My children, we have *one soul*, and when that is lost, all is lost; and, *once lost*, it is lost *forever!* In a word, upon the last breath we breathe in dying, depends whether we shall be forever blessed, or forever in despair. If the Eternity of the next life, if Paradise, if hell, were mere fictions of literary men, things of doubtful reality, even then we ought to bestow all our care to live well, and not to risk our soul to be lost forever. But it is not so; these things are not doubtful; they are beyond dispute; they are things of Faith; they are more real than the things we see with our bodily sight.

Let us then pray to our Lord: *Increase our Faith* (Luke xvii. 5); for we may, if weak in Faith, become worse than Luther or Calvin. On the other hand, one thought of living Faith upon the Eternity that awaits us can make us Saints.

St. Gregory writes that they who meditate on Eternity are neither puffed up by prosperity, nor cast down by adversity; for they desire nothing and fear nothing in this world. When infirmities or persecutions come upon us, let us think of the hell we have deserved through our sins. Thus every cross will seem light, and we shall thank the Lord, saying: *It is the mercy of the Lord that we are not consumed* (Lament. iii. 22). And with David: *Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell* (Ps. xciii. 17). Through myself I was already lost; Thou hast done this, O God of mercy! Thou hast stretched forth Thy hand, and drawn me forth from hell: Thou hast delivered my soul, that it should not perish (Is. xxxviii. 17).

O my God, Thou knowest how often I have deserved hell; but, notwithstanding, Thou biddest me hope, and I desire to hope. My sins terrify me, but Thy death gives me courage, and Thou dost promise pardon to him that repents. A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. I have dishonoured Thee in the time past, but now I love Thee above all things, and I grieve more than for any other evil, that I have offended Thee. O my Jesus, have mercy upon me. Mary, Mother of God, pray for me.

Evening Meditation

THE DWELLING OF JESUS IN EGYPT

I.

Jesus chose to dwell in Egypt during His infancy, that therein He might lead a hard and a more abject life. According to St. Anselm and other writers, the Holy Family lived in Heliopolis. Let us with St. Bonaventure contemplate the life of Jesus during the seven years He remained in Egypt, as was revealed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi.

The house is very poor, for St. Joseph has little wherewith to pay rent; their bed is poor, their food poor; their life, in short, is one of strict poverty, for day by day they barely gain their livelihood by the work of their hands, and they live in a country where they are unknown and are despised, having neither relatives nor friends.

The Holy Family does indeed live in great poverty; but oh, how well-ordered are the occupations of these three sojourners! The Holy Infant speaks not with His tongue, but in His Heart He continually speaks to His Heavenly Father, offering all His sufferings, and every moment of His life for our salvation. And Mary does not speak, but at the sight of that dear Infant she meditates on the Divine love, and the favour that God has conferred upon her by choosing her for His Mother. Joseph also works in silence; but at the sight of the Divine Child his heart is inflamed, and he thanks the Child for having chosen him for the companion and guardian of His life.

O Holy Infant, Who livest in this country of barbarians, poor, unknown, and despised, I acknowledge Thee for my God and Saviour, and I thank Thee for all the humiliations and sufferings Thou didst endure in Egypt for the love of me. By Thy manner of life there Thou dost teach me to live as a pilgrim on this earth, giving me to understand that this is not my country; but that Paradise which Thou hast purchased for me by Thy death, is my home. Ah, my Jesus, I have been ungrateful to Thee because I have thought but little of what Thou hast done and suffered for me. When I think that Thou, the Son of God, didst lead a life of such tribulation upon this earth, so poor and neglected, how is it possible that I should go about seeking

the amusements and good things of the earth? Take me, I pray Thee, my dear Redeemer, for Thy companion; admit me to live always united with Thee upon this earth, in order that, united with Thee in Heaven, I may love Thee there, and be Thy companion throughout eternity.

II.

In this house Mary weans Jesus: at first she fed Him from her breast, now she feeds Him with her hands; she holds Him in her lap, takes from the porringer a little bread soaked in water, and puts it into the sacred mouth of her Son. In this house Mary released her Infant from His swathing-bands, and made Him His first little garments and dressed Him in them. In this house the Child Jesus begins to walk and speak. Let us adore the first steps of the Incarnate Word, and the first words of Eternal Wisdom uttered by Him. Here also He began to do the work of a little servant-boy, occupying Himself in all the little services that a child can render.

Ah, weaning! ah, little garment! ah, first steps! ah, lisping words! ah, little services of the little Jesus, how do you not wound and inflame the hearts of those who love Jesus and meditate on everything in His life. Behold God trembling and falling! God lisping! God become so weak that He can occupy Himself in nothing but little household affairs, unable even to lift a bit of wood, if too heavy for the strength of a child! O Holy Faith, enlighten us, and make us love this good Lord, Who for the love of us has submitted Himself to so many miseries! It is said that on the entrance of Jesus into Egypt all the idols of the country fell down; oh, let us pray God that He will make us love Jesus from our hearts, since in the soul into which the love of Jesus enters, all idols of earthly affections are overthrown.

Give me light, O God; increase my Faith. What are riches, or pleasures, or dignities, or honours! All is vanity and folly. The only real riches, the only real good, is to possess Thee Who art the Infinite Good. Blessed he who loves Thee! I love Thee, O my Jesus, and I seek none other but Thee. I desire Thee, and Thou desirest me. If I had a thousand kingdoms, I would renounce them all to please Thee. "My God and my All!" If in times past I have sought after the vanities and pleasures of this world, I now

detest them, and am sorry that I have done so. My beloved Saviour, from this day forward Thou shalt be my only delight, my only love, my only treasure. Most holy Mary, pray to Jesus for me. Beseech Him to make me rich in His love alone, and I desire nothing more.

January the Tenth

Morning Meditation

THE FAILURE TO SAVE ONE'S SOUL IS WITHOUT REMEDY.

An irreparable affair! No error can be compared with the error of neglecting one's eternal salvation. For all other failures there is a remedy. If you lose your soul the loss is irreparable, for the soul, once lost, is lost for ever!

I.

No error, says St. Eucherius, can be compared with the error of neglecting eternal salvation. For all other errors there is a remedy: if you lose property in one way, you may recover it in another; if you lose a situation, there may be some means of afterwards regaining it; if your life be but brief, provided your soul be saved, all is safe. But if you lose your soul, the loss is irreparable. Death happens but once; the soul, once lost, is forever lost. Nothing remains but to weep for all eternity with the other miserable wretches in hell, whose greatest torment is the conviction, that the time for repairing their ruin is gone forever. *The summer is over, and we are not saved* (Jer. viii. 20). Ask the worldly wise now in that pit of fire, what are their present sentiments; ask them if, condemned to that eternal prison, they feel happy at having made a fortune in this life. Listen to their wailing and lamentation: *We have erred* (Wis. v. 6). But of what use is it to know their error now, when there is no remedy for their eternal damnation? Should a man find his palace in ruins, how great would be his pains in reflecting on the impossibility of repairing the evil, when his loss is due only to his own neglect.

The greatest torment of the damned consists in the thought of having lost their souls and of being damned through their own fault. *Destruction is thy own, O Israel* (Osee xiii. 9). St. Teresa says that if a person loses a ring or even a trifle through his own

fault, his peace is disturbed; he neither eats nor sleeps. O God! how great will be the torture of the damned Christian when, on entering hell and finding himself shut up in that dungeon of torments, he reflects on his misfortune, and sees that for all eternity there will be no relief, no mitigation of pain! He will say: "I have lost my soul! I have lost Paradise! I have lost my God! I have lost all -- and all is lost forever! And why? Through my own fault."

Ah my Jesus, remind me always of the death Thou hast suffered for me, and give me confidence. I tremble lest the devil should make me despair at death by bringing before my view the many acts of treason I have committed against Thee. How many promises have I made never more to offend Thee after the light Thou hast given me! and, after all my promises, I have, presuming on pardon, again turned my back upon Thee. Thus have I insulted Thee because Thou didst not chastise me! My Redeemer! give me a great sorrow for my sins before I leave this world. I ask of Thee sorrow and love.

II.

But you will say -- If I commit this sin why may I not hope to escape damnation? I may still be saved. Yes; but *you may also be damned*: and it is more likely that you will be damned, for the Scriptures threaten eternal woes to all obstinate traitors, such as you are in your present dispositions. *Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord* (Is. xxx. 1). *Woe to them, for they have departed from me* (Osee vii. 13). By committing this sin, you at least expose your eternal salvation to great danger. And is it an affair to be exposed to risk? There is no question of a house, of a villa, or of a situation. There is question, says St. John Chrysostom, of being sent into an eternity of torments, and of losing an eternity of glory. And will you risk this business of sovereign importance on a *perhaps*?

You say: Perhaps I shall not be lost: I hope that God will hereafter pardon me. But in the meantime what happens? You condemn yourself to hell. Tell me, would you cast yourself into a deep pool of water, saying: Perhaps I shall not be drowned? Surely you would not. Why then risk your eternal salvation on such a groundless hope, on a *perhaps*? Oh! how many has this accursed hope sent to hell! Do you realise that the hope of those who are

obstinately determined to commit sin is not *Hope*, but an *illusion* and *presumption* which move God, not to mercy, but to greater wrath? If you say you are now unable to resist the temptation and passion to whose domination you submit, how will you resist them hereafter, when, by yielding to sin, your strength will not be increased, but greatly diminished? For, on the one hand, your own malice will render you more blind and obdurate; and, on the other, Divine help will be withdrawn. Do you expect that the more you multiply your sins and insults against God, the more abundantly He will pour upon you His lights and graces?

I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended Thee. I promise to die a thousand times rather than abandon Thee. But make me in the meantime feel that Thou hast said to me what Thou didst say to Magdalen - *Thy sins are forgiven thee* - by giving me, before death, a great sorrow for all my iniquities, otherwise I fear my death will be troubled and unhappy. *Be not thou a terror unto me; thou art my hope in the day of affliction* (Jer. xvii. 17.). O my crucified Jesus! be not a terror to me in my last moments. If I die before I have wept over my sins and have loved Thee, Thy Wounds and Thy Blood will inspire me with fear rather than confidence. I do not ask of Thee consolations and earthly goods during the remainder of my life; I ask of Thee sorrow and love. O my dear Saviour, hear my prayer for the sake of that love which made Thee offer Thy life as a sacrifice for me on Calvary. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me these graces, along with holy perseverance till death.

Spiritual Reading

AN ADMONITION ADDRESSED TO PERSONS OF ALL STATES WHO DESIRE TO BE SAVED

God wishes us all to be saved: *Who will have all men to be saved* (I Tim. ii. 4). He is ready to give to all the help necessary for salvation; but He grants it only to those who ask Him, as St. Augustine says: "He gives only to those who ask." Hence it is the common opinion of Theologians, and of the Holy Fathers, that prayer is necessary for adults as a means of salvation; that is to say, a person who does not pray, but neglects to ask of God the help requisite for overcoming temptations, and for preserving grace already received, cannot be saved.

On the other hand, Our Lord cannot refuse to give grace to those who ask it, because He has promised to do so: *Cry to me, and I will hear thee* (Jer. xxxiii. 3). Have recourse to Me, and I will not fail to hear you. Ask of Me all you desire, and you shall obtain it: *Ask, and it shall be given to you* (Jo. xv. 7). These promises, however, are not to be understood with reference to temporal goods, because God gives these only when they are for the benefit of the soul; but He has promised absolutely to give spiritual graces to one who asks Him; and having made the promise God will keep it. "By His promise, He has made Himself our debtor," says St. Augustine.

It should also be observed that if God binds Himself by a promise to hear us, He binds us by precept to ask. *Ask, and it shall be given to you* (Matt. vii. 7). *We ought always to pray* (Luke xviii. 1). These words "ask" and "we ought" convey, as St. Thomas teaches, a grave precept, which is binding for our whole life; but especially is it binding when a man is in danger of death or of falling into sin; because if he does not then have recourse to God, he will certainly be overcome. And he who has already fallen under God's displeasure, commits a fresh sin when he neglects to turn to God for help to rise out of his miserable state. But will God hear him while he is yet His enemy? Yes, He will hear, if the sinner humbles himself, and from his heart prays for pardon; since it is written in the Gospel: *For everyone that asketh, receiveth* (Luke xi. 10). It says that God has promised to hear all who pray to Him, whether they are just or sinners. In another place God says: *Call upon me ... and I will deliver thee* (Ps. xlix. 15). Call upon Me, and I will deliver thee from hell, to which thou dost stand condemned.

There will be no excuse on the Day of Judgment for one who dies in mortal sin. It will be of no use for him to say that he had not the strength to resist the temptation which troubled him, because Jesus Christ will answer: If you had not the strength, why did you not ask it of Me, and I should certainly have given it you? If you fell into sin, why did you not have recourse to Me, that I might deliver you from it?

You see, then, if you desire to be saved, and would keep yourself in the grace of God, you must often pray to Him, that

He may keep His hand over you. The Council of Trent declares that for a man to persevere in the grace of God, it is not enough that he should have only that general aid which God gives to all, but he must also have that special assistance which can be obtained by holy Prayer. For this reason the Doctors of the Church say, that one is bound, under grievous sin, to recommend himself often to God, and to ask for the grace of holy perseverance at least once a month. And any one who finds himself in the midst of *dangerous occasions* is under the obligation of asking *more frequently* for the grace of perseverance.

It is besides most useful to keep up some particular devotion to the Mother of God, to obtain the grace of perseverance, for she is called the Mother of perseverance. A person who has not this special devotion to the Blessed Virgin will find it very difficult to persevere, for, as St. Bernard says, all divine graces, and especially this grace of perseverance, which is the greatest of all, come to us through the hands of Mary.

Would to God that preachers were more mindful in putting before their hearers this great means of prayer! They ought often to make it their chief subject, besides speaking of it in every discourse. If they omit to do so they will have to render a severe account to God. Many confessors, too, are particular about the resolution their penitents make *not to offend God again*, but few take the trouble to inculcate that *they must pray when they are again tempted to fall*. We must be well persuaded that, when a temptation is violent, if the penitent does not beg for God's assistance, all his resolutions will avail him little. Prayer alone can save him. It is certain that he who prays is saved; he who prays not is damned.

Therefore, I repeat, if you wish to be saved, pray continually to the Lord that He may give you light and strength not to fall into sin. We must be importunate with God, in asking Him for His grace. "This importunity with God is our opportunity," says St. Jerome. Every morning we must beseech Him to keep us from sin during that day. And when any bad thought presents itself to your mind or you are tempted by some dangerous occasion, immediately have recourse to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin, saying: "My Jesus help me! Most Blessed Virgin, come to

my aid!" It is enough at such a time to pronounce the Names of Jesus and Mary, and the temptation will vanish; but should the temptation continue, persevere in invoking the assistance of Jesus and Mary and you will be victorious.

Evening Meditation

THE RETURN OF JESUS FROM EGYPT

I.

According to the common opinion of the Doctors of the Church, Jesus lived as an exile in Egypt for seven years, and then, after the death of Herod, the Angel again appeared to St. Joseph and commanded him to take the Holy Child and His Mother and return to Palestine. St. Joseph, consoled by this command, communicates it to Mary. Before their departure, these holy spouses courteously informed the friends whom they had made in the country. Joseph then collects the few instruments of his trade, Mary her little bundle of clothes, and taking the Divine Child by the hand, they set out on their journey homewards, leading Him between them.

St. Bonaventure considers that this journey was more fatiguing to Jesus than was the flight into Egypt, because He had now grown to boyhood, and on this account Mary and Joseph could not carry Him in their arms on so long a journey, and at the same time the Holy Child, at that age, was not able to make a long journey. Jesus was therefore obliged through fatigue, frequently to stop and rest on the way. But Joseph and Mary, whether they walk or sit, always keep their eyes and thoughts fixed upon the beloved little Child, Who was the object of all their love. Oh, with what recollection does that happy soul pass through this life who keeps before its eyes the love and the example of Jesus Christ!

Beloved and adored Child, Thou dost return to Thy country; but whither, O God, whither dost Thou return? Thou comest to that place where Thy countrymen prepare for Thee insults during life, and scourges, thorns, and a Cross at Thy death. All this was already present to Thy divine eyes, O my Jesus! and yet Thou comest of Thy own will to meet that Passion which men prepare for Thee. My beloved Redeemer, if Thou hadst not come to die for me, I could not go to love Thee in

Paradise, but must have always remained far away from Thee. I acknowledge that hell would be but a slight punishment for me. But Thou hast waited to pardon me. I thank Thee, O my Redeemer; I repent, and detest all the offences I have committed against Thee. O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver me from hell. Ah, if I were miserable enough to damn myself, how would my torments in hell be increased by the remorse caused by my having meditated during life on the love Thou hast borne me!

II.

The holy Pilgrims interrupt, at times, the silence of this journey by some holy conversation; but with whom and of whom do they converse? They speak only with Jesus and of Jesus. He who has Jesus in his heart, speaks only with Jesus or only of Him.

Consider again the pain that our little Saviour must have endured during the nights of this long journey, in which He had no longer the bosom of Mary for His bed, as in His flight, but the bare ground; and for His food He had no more milk, but a little hard bread, too hard for His tender age. He was probably also afflicted by thirst, for, in this desert the Jews had been in such want of water, that a miracle was necessary to supply them with it. Let us contemplate and lovingly adore all these sufferings of the Child Jesus.

I love Thee now, dear Jesus, but I love Thee too little. Thou dost merit an infinite love. Grant at least that I may love Thee with all my strength. Ah, my Saviour, my Joy, my Life, my All, whom should I love if I love not Thee, the infinite Good? I consecrate all my wishes to Thy will; at the sight of the sufferings Thou hast undergone for me, I offer myself to suffer as much as it shall please Thee. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* (Matt. vi. 13). Deliver me from sin, and then dispose of me as Thou wilt. I love Thee, infinite Good, and I am content to receive any punishment, even to be annihilated, rather than live without loving Thee.

Second Friday of January

Morning Meditation

THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE FALSE GOODS.

St. Teresa used to say that nothing that *ends* ought to be

considered of any consequence. Death approaches, the curtain falls, the scene closes, and thus all things come to an end. Let us therefore strive to gain that fortune which will not fail with time.

I.

What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul (Matt. xvi. 26). O great maxim, which has conducted so many souls to Heaven, and given so many Saints to the Church! What doth it profit us to gain the whole world, which passes away, and lose the soul, which is eternal?

The world! And what is this world but mere show -- a scene which quickly passes away? *The fashion of this world passeth away* (1 Cor. vii. 31). Death approaches, the curtain falls, the scene closes, and thus all things come to an end!

Alas! at the hour of death, how will all worldly things appear to a Christian -- those silver vessels, those heaps of money, that rich and vain furniture -- when he must leave them all forever?

O Jesus! grant that henceforward my soul may be wholly Thine; grant that I may love no other but Thee. I desire to renounce all things before death tears me away from them.

What does it avail a man to be happy for a few days (if anything can be called happiness without God), if afterwards he must be unhappy forever?

David says that earthly goods, at the hour of death, will seem as a dream to one waking from sleep: *As the dream of them that awake* (Ps. lxxii. 20). What disappointment does he feel who, having dreamt that he was a king, on awaking finds himself still lowly and poor as ever!

O my God! who knows but that this Meditation which I am now reading may be the last call for me? Enable me to root out of my heart all earthly affections, before I enter into eternity. Grant that I may be sensible of the great wrong that I have done Thee, by offending Thee, and by forsaking Thee for the love of creatures. *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son* (Luke xv. 21). I am grieved for having turned my back upon Thee; do not reject me, now that I return to Thee.

II.

No post of honour, no pomps, no riches, no amusements, will console a Christian at the hour of death; the love of Jesus

Christ, and the little that he has suffered for His love, will alone console him.

Phillip II., when dying, said: "Oh that I had been a Lay-brother in some monastery, and not a king!" Philip III. said: "Oh that I had lived in a desert! for now I shall appear but with little confidence before the tribunal of God." Thus do those express themselves at the hour of death, who have been esteemed the most fortunate in this world.

In short, all earthly goods acquired during life generally end at the hour of death in remorse of conscience and fears of eternal damnation. O God! will the dying sinner say, I have had sufficient light to direct me to withdraw myself from the world, but yet I have followed the world, and the maxims of the world; and now what sentence will be pronounced upon me? Fool that I have been! I might have been a Saint, with the opportunities and advantages that I enjoyed! I might have led a happy life in union with God; and now what do I get from my past life? But when will he say this? When the scene is about to close, and he is entering eternity -- at the very moment on which will depend his happiness or misery forever!

O Lord, have pity on me! In the past I have not been so wise as to love Thee. From this day forward, Thou alone shalt be my only Good. My God and my All! Thou alone deservest all my love, and Thee alone will I love.

Spiritual Reading

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

I. WHAT THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE FOR GOD AND FOR US.

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 does not spring from 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 prove 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. 4). 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 the Divine glory; but no; and there was no means by which the glory of God could have been better manifested in the world than by Jesus Christ dying for the salvation of mankind, since the Passion of Jesus Christ has made us realize 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 like the death 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, being 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 very own Son, true God as the Father, to take human flesh, that as Man He might by His death pay the debt due to the divine Justice, and as God might make full satisfaction to it.

It has, moreover, made us understand how great is 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 the 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 justly have 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.* (Eph. v. 2).

From all eternity He 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 from Himself in hell, 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* (Col. ii. 14). And thus, through the merits of His own Blood, He pardons all our sins: *Forgiving you all offences* (Col. ii. 13). And at the same time He despoils the devils of the rights they had acquired over us, carrying along with Him in triumph not only ourselves, but even our enemies, whose prey we had become. *And despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in himself* (Col. ii. 15). On which Theophylact comments: "As a Conqueror in triumph, carrying with Him the booty and the enemy."

Hence, when satisfying 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. 32) -- when He heard one asking for mercy: *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom* (Luke xxiii. 42), overflowing with mercy, He promised 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 St.

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 completes 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).

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 *the throne of grace*, which Jesus crucified 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).

Evening Meditation

II. WHAT THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST REQUIRES OF US

I.

Does Jesus Christ, perhaps, claim too much in asking us to give ourselves wholly to Him, after He has given 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 even the death of the Cross, is not this to feel our hearts constrained by a violence which is all 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."

It was for this end, says St. Paul, that Jesus Christ died, that each of us should no longer live to the world or to himself, but to Him alone Who has given Himself wholly to us. *And Christ died for all, that they who live may not now live to themselves, but to 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 him-

self; 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?

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 of how I have so often 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 us from the charity of Christ?* (Rom. viii. 35). 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, and draw all my affections to Thyself, that so I may love none but Thee.

II.

Why, then, O my God! do we employ our affections in loving creatures, relatives, friends, the great ones of the world, who have never suffered for us scourges, thorns, or nails, nor 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 has 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! Moreover, in order to unite Himself more closely to us, He 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 the 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 ones."

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, too, 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 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, rather than that I had ever offended Thee! O Lamb of God! Thou hast bled 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 but Thee. *The God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever* (Ps. lxxii. 26).

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. Into thy hands I entrust my eternal salvation. *Spes nostra, salve!*

Second Saturday of January

Morning Meditation

THE LOSS OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Our Lord, having given us the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of perfection, it was necessary that she should be laden with sorrows, that in her we may admire heroic patience and endeavour to imitate it. The loss of her Son in the Temple was one of the greatest sorrows that Mary had to endure in her life. *Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water because the Comforter, the relief of my soul, is far from me* (Lament. i. 16).

I.

St. Luke relates that Mary and Joseph went every year to Jerusalem on the Feast of the Pasch, and took the Infant Jesus with them. It was the custom, says the Venerable Bede, when the Jews made this journey to the Temple, or at least on the return journey, for the men to be separated from the women; and the children went at their pleasure, either with their fathers or their mothers. Our Redeemer, Who was then twelve years old, remained during this Solemnity for three days in Jerusalem. Mary thought He was with Joseph, and Joseph that He was with Mary: *Thinking that he was in the company* (Luke ii. 44).

The Holy Child employed all these three days in honouring His Eternal Father, by fasts, vigils, and prayers, and in being present at the sacrifices, all of which were figures of His own great Sacrifice on the Cross. If He took a little food, says St. Bernard, He must have procured it by begging and if He took any repose, He could have no other bed but the bare ground.

When Mary and Joseph had come a day's journey, they did not find Jesus; wherefore, full of sorrow, they began to seek Him amongst their relatives and friends. At last, returning to Jerusalem, after three days they found Him in the Temple, disputing with the Doctors, who, full of astonishment, admired the questions and answers of this wonderful Child. On seeing Him Mary said: *Son why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing* (Luke ii. 48).

O Mary, thou weepst because thou hast lost thy Son for a few days; He has withdrawn Himself from thy eyes, but not from thy heart. Dost thou not see that the pure love with which thou lovest Him keeps Him constantly united and bound to thee? Thou knowest well that he who loves God cannot but be loved by God, Who says: *I love those that love me* (Prov. viii. 17); and with St. John: *He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him* (Jo. iv. 16). Wherefore, then, dost thou fear? Wherefore dost thou weep? Leave those tears to me, who have so often lost God through my own fault, by driving Him away from my soul. O my Jesus! how could I offend Thee thus with my eyes open, when I knew that by sinning I should lose Thee?

II.

There is not upon earth a sorrow like to that which is felt

by a soul that loves Jesus, when she fears that Jesus Christ has withdrawn Himself from her through some fault of her own. This was the sorrow of Mary and Joseph, which afflicted them so much during these days; for they feared, in their humility, as says the devout Lanspergius, that perhaps they had rendered themselves unworthy of the care of such a treasure. Wherefore, on seeing Him, Mary said to Him, in order to express this sorrow: *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And Jesus answered: Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?* (Luke ii. 49).

Let us learn from this Mystery two lessons: the first, that we must leave all our friends and relatives when the glory of God is in question; and secondly, that God easily makes Himself found by those who seek Him: *The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him* (Lam. iii. 25).

Thou wilt not that the heart that seeks Thee should despair, but rather that it should rejoice: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord* (Ps. civ. 3). If hitherto I have forsaken Thee, O my Love, I will now seek Thee, and will seek none but Thee. And provided I possess Thy grace, I renounce all the goods and pleasures of this world; I renounce even my own life. Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee; I love Thee, do Thou also love me. I esteem Thy love more than the dominion of the whole world. O my Jesus, I desire not to lose Thee any more; but I cannot trust myself, I trust in Thee: *In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; I shall not be confounded forever* (Ps. xxx. 6). I beseech Thee, do Thou bind me to Thee, and permit me not to be again separated from Thee. O Mary, through thee have I found my God, Whom I had once lost; do thou obtain for me also holy perseverance; wherefore I will also say to thee with St. Bonaventure: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever."

Spiritual Reading

THE THIRD SWORD OF SORROW (The Third Dolour)

There are some who assert, and not without reason, that this Dolour was not only one of the greatest, but the greatest and most painful of all.

For, in the first place, Mary, in her other Dolours, had Jesus with her; she suffered when St. Simeon prophesied to her in the

Temple; she suffered in the Flight into Egypt; but still in company with Jesus. But in this Dolour she suffered far from Jesus, not knowing where He was: *And the light of my eyes itself is not with me* (Ps. xxxvii. 11). Thus weeping she then said: "Ah, the light of my eyes, my dear Jesus, is no longer with me; He is far from me, and I know not whither He is gone!" Origen says, that through the love which this holy Mother bore her Son, "she suffered more in this loss of Jesus than any Martyr ever suffered in the separation of his soul from his body." Ah, too long indeed were those three days for Mary; they seemed three ages; they were all bitterness, for there was none to comfort her. And who can ever comfort me, she said with the Prophet, who can console me, since He Who could alone do so is far from me? And therefore my eyes can never weep enough: *Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water, because the Comforter ... is far from me* (Lam. i. 16). And with Tobias she repeated; *What manner of joy shall be to me who sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven* (Tob. v. 12).

In the second place, Mary, in all her other Sorrows, well understood their cause -- the Redemption of the world, the Divine will; but in this she knew not the cause of the absence of her Son. "The sorrowful Mother," says Lanspergius, "was grieved at the absence of Jesus, because, in her humility, she considered herself unworthy to remain longer with or to attend upon Him on earth, and have the charge of so great a Treasure." "And who knows," she thought within herself, "maybe I have not served Him as I ought; perhaps I have been guilty of some negligence, for which He has left me." "They sought Him," says Origen, "lest perchance He had entirely left them." It is certain that, to a soul that loves God, there can be no greater pain than the fear of having displeased Him. Therefore in this Sorrow alone did Mary complain, lovingly expostulating with Jesus, after she had found Him: *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing* (Luke ii. 48). By these words she had no thought of reproving Jesus, as heretics blasphemously assert, but only meant to express to Him the grief proceeding from the great love she bore Him, which she had experienced during His absence: "It was not a rebuke," says Denis the Carthusian, "but a loving complaint."

In fine, this sword so cruelly pierced the heart of the most holy Virgin, that the Blessed Benvenuta, desiring one day to share the holy Mother's pain in this Dolour, and entreating her for this favour, Mary appeared to her with the Infant Jesus in her arms; but while Benvenuta was enjoying the sight of this most beautiful Child, in a moment she was deprived of it. So great was her grief that she had recourse to Mary, entreating her to mitigate it, that it might not cause her death. In three days the holy Virgin again appeared, and said: "Know, my daughter, that thy sorrow is only a small part of that which I endured when I lost my Son."

This sorrow of Mary ought, in the first place, to serve as a consolation to those souls who are desolate, and no longer enjoy, as they once enjoyed, the sweet presence of their Lord. They may weep, but they should weep in peace, as Mary wept over the absence of her Son; and let them take courage and not fear that on this account they have lost the divine favour; for God Himself assured St. Teresa, that "no one is lost without knowing it; and that no one is deceived without wishing to be deceived." If Our Lord withdraws Himself from the sight of a soul that loves Him, He does not, therefore, depart from the heart; He often conceals Himself from a soul, that it may seek Him with a more ardent desire and greater love. But whoever wishes to find Jesus must seek Him, not amidst delights and pleasures of the world, but amidst crosses and mortifications, as Mary sought Him. *We sought thee sorrowing*, as Mary said to her Son. "Learn then, from Mary," says Origen, "to seek Jesus."

Moreover, in this world she would seek no other good than Jesus. Job was not unhappy when he lost all that he possessed on earth; riches, children, health and honours, and even descended from a throne to a dunghill; but because he had God with him, he was even then happy. St. Augustine says: he had lost what God had given him, but he still had God Himself." Truly miserable and unhappy are those souls that have lost God. If Mary wept over the absence of her Son for three days, how should sinners weep, who have lost divine grace, and to whom God says: *You are not my people, and I will not be yours* (Osee i. 9). For this is the effect of sin; it separates the soul from God: *Your iniquities*

have divided between you and your God (Is. lix. 2). Hence, if sinners possess all the riches of the earth, but have lost God, all, even in this world, becomes vanity and affliction to them, as Solomon confessed: *Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit* (Eccles. i. 14). But the greatest misfortune of these poor blind souls is, as St. Augustine observes, that if they lose an ox, they do not fail to go in search of it; if they lose a sheep, they use all diligence to find it; if they lose a beast of burden, they cannot rest; but when they lose their God, Who is the supreme Good, they eat and drink and repose.

It is related that in India a young man was leaving his room with the intention of committing a sin, when he heard a voice saying: "Stop! whither art thou going?" He turned around, and saw an image in relief, representing our Lady of Sorrows, who, drawing out the sword which was in her breast, said: "Take this dagger and pierce my heart, rather than wound my Son by committing such a sin!" On hearing these words the youth prostrated himself on the ground, and bursting into tears, with deep sorrow, asked and obtained pardon from God and our Blessed Lady.

Evening Meditation

"HE WAS SUBJECT TO THEM."

I.

St. Joseph, on his return to Palestine, heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea instead of his father, Herod, whereupon he was afraid to go and live there; and being warned in a dream, he went to live in Nazareth, a city of Galilee, and there in a poor little cottage he fixed his dwelling. O blessed house of Nazareth, I salute and venerate thee! There will come a time when thou wilt be visited by the great ones of the earth: when the pilgrims find themselves inside thy poor walls, they will never be satisfied with shedding tears of tenderness at the thought that within them the King of Paradise passed nearly all His life.

O my adorable Infant, I see Thee an humble servant-boy, working even in the sweat of Thy brow in this poor shop. I understand it all; Thou art serving and working for me. But since Thou dost employ Thy whole life for the love of me, so grant, I pray Thee, my dear Saviour, that I may employ all the rest of my life for Thy love. Look at my past life: it has been a life of sorrow

and tears both for me and for Thee -- a life of disorder, a life of sin. Oh, permit me at least to keep Thee company during the remainder of my days, and to labour and suffer with Thee in the shop of Nazareth, and afterwards to die with Thee on Calvary, embracing that death which Thou hast destined for me. My dear Jesus, my love, suffer me not to leave and forsake Thee again, as I have done in times past.

II.

In this house, then, the Incarnate Word lived during the remainder of His infancy and youth. And how did He live? Poor and despised by men, performing the offices of a common working-boy, and obeying Joseph and Mary: *and he was subject to them.* (Luke ii. 51). O God, how touching it is to think that in this poor house the Son of God lives as a servant! Now He goes to fetch water; then He opens or shuts the shop; now He sweeps the room; now He collects the shavings for the fire; now He labours in assisting Joseph at his trade. O wonder! To see God sweeping! God serving as a boy! O thought that ought to make us all burn with holy love for our Redeemer, Who has reduced Himself to such humiliations in order to gain our love!

Let us adore all these servile actions of Jesus, which were all divine. Let us adore, above all, the hidden life that Jesus Christ led in the house of Nazareth! O proud men, how can you desire to make yourselves seen and honoured, when you behold your God, Who spends thirty years of His life in poverty, hidden and unknown, to teach us the love of retirement and of a humble and a hidden life!

O my God, Thou art suffering such poverty in a shop, hidden, unknown, despised; and I, a vile worm, have gone about seeking honours and pleasures, and for the sake of these have separated myself from Thee, O sovereign Good! Now, my Jesus, I love Thee; and because I love Thee I will not remain any longer separated from Thee. I renounce all things, in order to unite myself to Thee, my hidden and despised Redeemer. Thy grace gives me more happiness than have all the vanities and pleasures of the world, for which I have so miserably forsaken Thee. Eternal Father, for the merits of Jesus Christ, unite me to Thyself by the gift of Thy holy love. Most holy Virgin, how blessed wert

thou, who, being the companion of thy Son in this poor and hidden life, didst make thyself so like to thy Jesus! O my Mother, grant that I also, at least during the short remainder of my life, may endeavour to become like to thee and to my Redeemer.
Amen.

First Sunday after Epiphany

(The Feast of the Holy Family)

Morning Meditation

JESUS AT NAZARETH

And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men (Gospel of Feast. Luke ii. 42-52).

Every word, every action of Jesus was so holy that it filled all with love for Him, but especially Mary and Joseph who were constantly observing Him. A God serving as a boy! A God working, and sweating as He planes a piece of wood! Ought not the mere thought of this to move our hearts to love Him!

I.

St. Luke, speaking of the life of the Infant Jesus in the house of Nazareth, writes: *And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men* (Luke ii. 52). As Jesus grew in age, so did He increase in wisdom; not that He went on every year acquiring knowledge of things, as is the case with us; for, from the first moment of His life, Jesus was full of all Divine knowledge and wisdom: *In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col. ii. 3). But it is said that He advanced, because every day as He advanced in age He manifested more and more His sublime wisdom.

Thus it is also said that He advanced in grace with God and men; with God, because all His divine actions, though they did not render Him more holy or increase His merit -- since Jesus was from the first full of sanctity and merit, of Whose fulness we have received all graces; *of his fulness we have all received* (Jo. i. 16); -- yet, nevertheless, these operations of the Redeemer were all sufficient in themselves to increase His grace and merit.

Grow, my beloved Jesus, grow continually for me; grow to teach me Thy virtues by Thy divine example; grow to consummate the great sacrifice on the Cross, on which depends my

eternal salvation! Grant also my Saviour, that I, too, may grow more in Thy love and grace. Miserable that I have been, my ingratitude has only increased towards Thee Who hast loved me so much. O my Jesus, grant that in future it may be just the contrary with me; Thou knowest all my weakness, it is from Thee that I must receive light and strength. Make me know the claims which Thou hast to my love. Thou art a God of infinite beauty and of infinite majesty, Who didst not refuse to come down upon this earth and become Man for us, and for our sakes to lead a life abject and painful, and to end it by a most cruel death. And where can we ever find an object more amiable and more worthy of love than Thee? Fool that I was, in times past I refused to know Thee, and therefore I lost Thee. I implore Thy pardon; I am heartily sorry, and I am determined to be entirely devoted to Thee in future.

II.

He advanced also in grace with men, increasing in beauty and amiability. Oh, how Jesus showed Himself more and more amiable every day of His youth, showing more and more every day the claims He had upon men's love! With what delight did the holy Youth obey Mary and Joseph! With what recollection of mind did He work! With what moderation did He partake of food! With what modesty did He speak! With what sweetness and affability did He converse with all! With what devotion did He pray! In a word, every action, every word, every movement of Jesus, inflamed with love the hearts of all those who beheld Him, and especially of Mary and Joseph, who had the good fortune to see Him always at their side. Oh, how these holy spouses remained always intent in contemplating and admiring the operations, the words, and gestures of this Man-God!

Look at Jesus growing towards manhood, how busily He toils and labours, in helping Joseph in his trade of a carpenter! Who can ever attentively consider Jesus, that beautiful Youth, fatiguing and exhausting Himself in bringing into form some rough-hewn piece of wood, and not exclaim: But, most sweet Youth, art Thou not that God, Who by a word didst create the world out of nothing? And how comes it that Thou hast laboured now for a whole day, bathed in sweat, to fashion this

piece of wood; and even still Thy work remains unfinished? What has reduced Thee to such a state of weakness? O Holy Faith! O Divine Love! O God! O God! how such a thought as this, if once well mastered, would suffice, not only to inflame us, but to reduce us, so to speak, to ashes with the fire of love! Has a God, then, come to such a pass as this? And wherefore? To make Himself loved by men!

O most amiable Infant Jesus, God and Man, it was Thy burning love for me which urged Thee to do all this. I give Thee thanks; and I beseech Thee, by Thy Incarnation, to give me the grace to correspond to such great goodness.

O my sweetest Love, I am sorry that I have offended Thee. I desire to be always faithful in Thy service; enkindle in me Thy love; make me chaste and holy.

Spiritual Reading

MARY'S POVERTY

Our most loving Redeemer, that we might learn from Him to despise the things of the world, was pleased to be poor on earth: *Being rich*, says St. Paul, *he became poor for your sake, that through his poverty you might be rich* (2 Cor. viii. 9). Therefore doth Jesus Christ exhort each one who desires to be His disciple: *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor ... and come, follow me* (Matt. xix. 21).

Behold Mary, His most perfect disciple, who indeed imitated His example. Father Canisius proves that Mary could have lived in comfort on the property she inherited from her parents, but she preferred to remain poor, and reserving only a small portion for herself, distributed the rest in alms to the Temple and the poor. Many authors are of opinion that Mary even made a Vow of Poverty; and we know that she herself said to St. Bridget: "from the beginning I vowed in my own heart that I would never possess anything on earth.

The gifts received from the holy Magi cannot certainly have been of small value; but we are assured by St. Bernard that she distributed them to the poor through the hands of St. Joseph. That the divine Mother immediately disposed of these gifts is evident from the fact that, at her Purification in the Temple, she did not offer a lamb, which was the offering prescribed in

Leviticus for those who could afford it, *for a son she shall bring a lamb* (Lev. xii. 6); but she offered two turtledoves, or two pigeons, which was the oblation prescribed for the poor: *And to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons* (Luke ii. 24). Mary herself said to St. Bridget: "All that I could get I gave to the poor, and only reserved a little food and clothing for myself."

Out of love for poverty she did not disdain to marry St. Joseph, who was only a poor carpenter, and afterwards to maintain herself by the work of her hands, spinning or sewing, as we are assured by St. Bonaventure. The Angel, speaking of Mary, told St. Bridget that "worldly riches were of no more value in her eyes than mire." In a word, she lived always poor, and she died poor; for at her death we do not know that she left anything but her two poor gowns, to two women who had served her during her life, as it is recorded by Metaphrastes and Nicephorus.

St. Philip Neri used to say that "he who loves the things of the world will never become a Saint." We may add what St. Teresa says on the same subject, that "it justly follows that he who runs after perishable things, should also himself be lost." But, on the other hand, she adds, that the virtue of poverty is a treasure which comprises in itself all other treasures. She says the "virtue of poverty"; for, as St. Bernard remarks, this virtue does not consist only *in being poor*, but *in loving poverty*. Therefore did Jesus Christ say: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. v. 3). They are blessed because they desire nothing but God, and in God they find every good; in poverty they find their Paradise on earth, as St. Francis did when He exclaimed: "My God and my All."

Let us, then, as St. Augustine exhorts us, "love that one Good in which all good things are found," and address our Lord in the words of St. Ignatius: "Give me only Thy love and Thy grace, and I am rich enough."

When we have to suffer from poverty, let us console ourselves, says St. Bonaventure, with the thought that Jesus and His Mother were also poor like ourselves.

Ah, my most holy Mother, thou hadst indeed reason to say that God was thy joy: *and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*

(Luke i. 47); for in this world thou didst desire and love no other good but God. *Draw me after thee* (Cant. i. 3). O Lady, detach me from the world, that I may love Him alone, Who alone deserves to be loved. Amen.

Evening Meditation

JOSEPH'S LOVE FOR MARY AND JESUS

I.

Consider, in the first place, the love which Joseph bore to his holy spouse. Of all the women who had ever lived, she was the most beautiful. She was more humble, more meek, more pure, more obedient, more inflamed with the love of God, than all Angels or all men who have been, or shall be, created. Hence she merited all the affections of Joseph, who was so great a lover of virtue. Add to this, the tenderness with which he saw himself loved by Mary, who certainly loved her own spouse above all creatures. Besides, Joseph regarded her as the beloved of God, chosen to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son. Consider how great must have been the affection which, for all these reasons, the just and grateful heart of Joseph entertained for so amiable a spouse as Mary.

Consider, secondly, the love which Joseph bore to Jesus. Having given to our Saint the place of father to Jesus, God must certainly have infused into the heart of Joseph the love of a father, and of a father of a Son so amiable, a Son Who was also God. Hence the love of Joseph was not purely human, like the love of other fathers, but a love superhuman; for he found in the same person One Who behaved like his son, and yet was his God. Joseph knew from the Angel, by a divine revelation, that the Child by Whom he was always accompanied was the Divine Word, Who had become Man for the love of men, and especially for the love of him. He knew that he himself had been chosen from among all men to be the guardian of the life of the divine Infant, and that the Infant wished to be called his Son.

Most holy Patriarch, I rejoice at thy happiness and greatness, in being made worthy to have power to command, with the authority of father, Him Whom Heaven and earth obey. My holy patron, since a God has served thee, I too wish to enrol myself in thy service. I wish henceforth to serve thee, to honour

and love thee as my master. Take me under thy protection, and dispose of me as thou pleasest. I know that whatever thou shalt tell me to do, will be for my welfare, and for thy glory and that of my Redeemer.

II.

Consider what a flame of holy love must have been kindled in the heart of Joseph by meditating on all these things, and in seeing his Lord performing for him all the little offices of a boy -- at one time opening and closing the door; at another helping him to saw or plane; and at another, gathering fragments of wood, or sweeping the house; and finally, in seeing that He obeyed all his commands, and never did anything without his direction.

What affection must he have felt in carrying Jesus in his arms, caressing Him, and in receiving the caresses of that sweet Infant! In hearing from Him the words of Eternal Life, which, like so many loving darts, wounded his heart! And particularly in witnessing the holy examples of all virtues which the divine Child gave him. Long familiarity with persons who love one another cools their affection; for the longer men converse together, the more perfectly they learn one another's defects. This was not the case with Joseph; the more he conversed with Jesus, the better he became acquainted with His sanctity. Consider, then, how great was Joseph's love for Jesus, since, according to the authors, he enjoyed His company for the space of twenty-five years.

My holy St. Joseph, pray to Jesus for me. Having obeyed all thy commands on earth, He will certainly never refuse anything thou askest of Him. Tell Him to pardon me the offences that I have offered to Him. Tell Him to detach me from creatures and from myself; ask Him to inflame me with His holy love; and then let Him treat me as He pleases.

And thou, O most holy Mary, through the love which Joseph bore thee, take me under thy patronage, and beg of this thy spouse to accept me for his servant.

And Thou, O my dear Jesus, Who, to atone for my disobedience, didst wish to humble Thyself so as to obey a man, ah, through the merits of the obedience which Thou didst show on earth to Joseph, give me grace henceforth to obey all Thy wish-

es; and through the love Thou didst bear to Joseph, and which he bore to Thee, grant me a great love of Thee, O infinite Goodness, Who dost deserve the love of my whole heart; forget the injuries I have done Thee, and have mercy on me. I love Thee, O my Love; I love Thee, O my God; I wish always to love Thee.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

(December 8th)

Morning Meditation

*IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE ETERNAL FATHER
SHOULD PRESERVE MARY FROM ORIGINAL SIN.*

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters (Cant. ii. 2).

Great indeed was the injury entailed on Adam and on all his posterity by his accursed sin. But from this general misfortune God was pleased to exempt the Blessed Virgin, as the predestined Mother of His only begotten Son and the first-born of Grace. She was to crush the serpent's head and to be the sinless Mediatrix of peace between men and God. Hence the Eternal Father could well say of His beloved Daughter: *As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters*, always immaculate and always beloved.

I.

It was most becoming that God should preserve Mary from original sin for He destined her to crush the head of the infernal spirit which, by seducing our First Parents, brought death upon all men. This the Lord foretold: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head* (Gen. iii. 15). But if Mary was that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her and make her his slave. Reason would indeed demand that she should be preserved from all stain and even momentary subjection to her opponent. How then could God permit that she should first be the slave of the infernal serpent? Praised and ever blessed be God, Who, in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed Mary with such great grace that, remaining always free from guilt of sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound the serpent's pride.

Besides this it was wholly becoming that the Eternal Father should create Mary, "the one and only daughter of life," free from the stain of original sin and always possessed by His grace, destined as she was to be the repairer of a lost world, Mediatrix of peace between men and God. "O Blessed Virgin," says St. John Damascene, "thou wast born that thou mightest minister to the salvation of the whole world." "Hail, reconciler of the whole world!" cries out St. Ephrem. "Hail, thou, who art appointed umpire between God and man!" cries St. Basil of Silicia.

Now it certainly would not be becoming to choose an enemy to treat of peace with the offended person, and still less an accomplice in the crime itself. St. Gregory says that, "an enemy cannot undertake to appease his judge who is at the same time the injured party; for if he did, instead of appeasing him, he would provoke him to greater wrath." And, therefore, as Mary was to be the Mediatrix of peace between men and God, it was of the utmost importance that she should not herself appear as a sinner and an enemy of God, but that she should appear in all things as a friend, and free from every stain. Hence it was becoming that God should preserve her from sin, that she might not appear guilty of the same fault as the men for whom she was to intercede.

Ah, my Immaculate Lady, I rejoice with thee on seeing thee enriched with so great purity. I thank our common Creator for having preserved thee from every stain of sin. *Thou art all fair and there is not a spot in thee!* (Cant. iv. 7). O most pure dove, all fair, all beautiful, always the friend of God! Ah, most sweet, most amiable, immaculate Mary, disdain not to cast thy compassionate eyes upon the wounds of my soul. Behold me, pity me, heal me! The happy day when I shall go to behold thy beauty in Paradise seems a thousand years off, so much do I long to praise and love thee more than I now do, my Mother, my Queen, my beloved, most sweet, most pure, immaculate Mary! Amen.

II.

But above all it was becoming that the Eternal Father should preserve this His daughter unspotted from Adam's sin, because He predestined her to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son. As Jesus was the first-born of God, *the first-born of every creature*

(Col. i. 15), so was Mary, the destined Mother of God, always considered by Him as His first-born by adoption, and therefore He always possessed her by His grace. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways* (Prov. viii. 22). For the honour, therefore, of His Son, it was becoming that the Father should preserve the Mother from every stain of sin. When David was planning the Temple of Jerusalem, on a scale of magnificence worthy of God, he said: *For a house is being prepared not for man but for God* (1 Par. xxix. 1). How much more reasonable, then, is it not, to suppose that the Sovereign Architect, Who destined Mary to be the Mother of His own Son, adorned her soul with all the most precious gifts that she might be a dwelling worthy of a God!

We know that a man's highest honour is to be born of noble parents. *And the glory of children are their fathers* (Prov. xvii. 6). How, then, can we suppose that God Who could cause His Son to be born of a noble Mother by preserving her from sin, would, on the contrary, permit Him to be born of one infected by it, and thus leave it always in Lucifer's power to reproach Him with the shame of having a mother who had once been his slave and the enemy of God. No, certainly, the Eternal Father did not permit this; but He well provided for the honour of His Son by preserving His Mother always immaculate, that she might be a Mother worthy of such a Son. And the Holy Church herself assures us of this: "O Almighty and Eternal God Who by the co-operation of the Holy Ghost, didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary, that she might become a worthy habitation for Thy Son."

Ah, my most beautiful Lady, I rejoice in seeing thee, by thy purity and thy beauty, so dear to God. I thank God for having preserved thee from every stain. O thou, who from the first moment of thy life didst appear pure and beautiful before God, pity me, who not only was born in sin, but have again since Baptism stained my soul with crimes. What grace will God ever refuse thee? Immaculate Virgin, thou hast to save me. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE SON SHOULD PRESERVE HIS MOTHER FROM ORIGINAL SIN.

In the second place it was becoming that the Son should

preserve Mary from sin, as being His Mother. No man can choose his mother; but should such a thing ever be granted to any one, who is there who, if able to choose a queen, would wish for a slave? Or if able to choose a friend of God, would wish for an enemy? If, then, the Son of God alone could choose a Mother according to His own Heart and His own liking, we must consider, as a matter of course, that He chose one worthy of God. St. Bernard says, "that the Creator of men becoming man, must have Himself selected a Mother who He knew would be worthy of Him." As it was becoming that a most pure God should have a Mother pure from all sin, He created her spotless. Here we may apply the words of the Apostle to the Hebrews: *For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest; holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners* (Heb. vii. 26). A learned author observes that, according to St. Paul, it was fitting that our Blessed Redeemer should not only be separated from sin, but also from sinners; according to the explanation of St. Thomas, who says, "that it was necessary that He, Who came to take away sins, should be separated from sinners, as to the fault under which Adam lay." But how could Jesus Christ be said to be separated from sinners, if He had a Mother who was a sinner?

St. Ambrose says, "that Christ chose this vessel into which He was about to descend, not of earth, but from Heaven; and He consecrated it a temple of purity." This agrees with that which St. John the Baptist revealed to St. Bridget, saying: "It was not becoming that the King of Glory should repose otherwise than in a chosen vessel exceeding all men and angels in purity." And to this we may add that which the Eternal Father Himself said to the same Saint: "Mary was a clean, and an unclean vessel: clean, for she was all fair; but unclean because she was born of sinners, though she was conceived without sin, that My Son might be born of her without sin." And remark these last words: "Mary was conceived without sin." Not that Jesus Christ could have contracted sin; but that He might not be reproached with even having a Mother infected with it, who would consequently have been the slave of the devil.

The Holy Ghost says that *the glory of a man is from the honour of his father, and a father without honour is the disgrace of the son*

(Ecclus. iii. 13). "Therefore it was," says an ancient writer, "that Jesus preserved the body of Mary from corruption after death; for it would have been to His dishonour had that virginal flesh with which He had clothed Himself become the food of worms." For, he adds: "Corruption is a disgrace of human nature; and as Jesus was not subject to it, Mary was also exempted; for the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary." But since corruption of her body would have been a disgrace for Jesus Christ, because He was born of her, how much greater would the disgrace have been, had He been born of a mother whose soul was once infected by the corruption of sin? For not only is it true that the flesh of Jesus is the same as that of Mary, "but," adds the same author, "the flesh of our Saviour, even after His Resurrection, remained the same that He had taken from His Mother. The flesh of Christ is the flesh of Mary; and though it was glorified by the glory of His Resurrection, yet it remains the same that was taken from Mary." And now if this is true, supposing that the Blessed Virgin had been conceived in sin, though the Son could not have contracted its stain, nevertheless His having united flesh to Himself which once had been infected with sin, a vessel of uncleanness and subject to Lucifer, would always have been a dishonour to Him.

Mary was not only the Mother, but the worthy Mother of our Saviour. She is called so by all the holy Fathers. St. Bernard says: "Thou alone wast found worthy to be chosen as the one in whose virginal womb the King of kings should have His first abode." St. Thomas of Villanova says: "Before she conceived she was already worthy to be the Mother of God." The Holy Church herself attests that Mary merited to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, saying: "The Blessed Virgin, who merited to bear in her womb Christ our Lord"; and St. Thomas Aquinas, explaining these words, says, that "the Blessed Virgin is said to have merited to bear the Lord of all; not that she merited His Incarnation, but that she merited, by the graces she had received, such a degree of purity and sanctity, that she could worthily be the Mother of God"; that is to say, Mary could not merit the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, but by divine grace she merited such a degree of perfection as to render her worthy to be the Mother of a God;

according to what St. Augustine says: "Her singular sanctity, the effect of grace, merited that she alone should be judged worthy to receive a God."

And now, supposing that Mary was worthy to be the Mother of God, "what excellence and what perfection was there that did not become her?" asks St. Thomas of Villanova. St. Thomas says: "that when God chooses any one for a particular dignity, He renders him fit for it"; hence he adds: "that God, having chosen Mary for His Mother, He also by His grace rendered her worthy of this highest of all dignities." "The Blessed Virgin was divinely chosen to be the Mother of God, and therefore we cannot doubt that God had fitted her by His grace for this dignity; and we are assured of it by the Angel: *For thou hast found grace with God; behold thou shalt conceive* (Luke i. 50). And thence the Saint argues that "the Blessed Virgin never committed any actual sin, not even a venial one. Otherwise," he says, "she would not have been a mother worthy of Jesus Christ; for the ignominy of the Mother would also have been that of the Son, for He would have had a sinner for His mother." And now if Mary, on account of a single venial sin, which does not deprive a soul of divine grace, would not have been a mother worthy of God, how much more unworthy would she have been had she contracted the guilt of original sin, which would have made her an enemy of God and a slave of the devil? And this reflection it was that made St. Augustine utter those memorable words, that, when speaking of Mary for the honour of Our Lord, Whom she merited to have for her Son, he would not entertain even the question of sin in her; "for we know," he says, "that through Him, Who it is evident was without sin, and Whom she merited to conceive and bring forth, she received grace to conquer all sin."

It was no shame to Jesus Christ that He was contemptuously called by the Jews the Son of Mary, meaning that He was the Son of a poor woman: *Is not his mother called Mary?* (Matt. xiii. 55). He came into this world to give us an example of humility and patience. But, on the other hand, it would undoubtedly have been a disgrace should He have heard the devil say: "Was not His mother a sinner? Was He not born of a wicked mother, who was once our slave?" It would even have been unbecoming had

Jesus Christ been born of a woman whose body was deformed, or crippled, or possessed by devils; but how much more would it not have been so, had He been born of a woman whose soul had been once deformed by sin, and in the possession of Lucifer!

Ah! indeed, God, Who is Wisdom itself, well knew how to prepare Himself a becoming dwelling, in which to reside on earth: *Wisdom hath built herself a house* (Prov. ix. 1). *The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle. God will help it in the morning early* (Ps. xlv. 5, 6). David says our Lord sanctified this His dwelling *in the morning early*; that is to say, from the beginning of her life, to render her worthy of Himself; for it was not becoming that a Holy God should choose Himself a dwelling that was not holy: *Holiness becometh thy house* (Ps. xcii. 5). The Holy Church sings: "Thou, O Lord, hast not disdained to dwell in the Virgin's Womb." Yes, for He would have disdained to have taken flesh in the womb of an Agnes, a Gertrude, a Teresa, because these virgins, though holy, were nevertheless for a time stained with original sin; but He did not disdain to become Man in the womb of Mary, because this beloved Virgin was always pure and free from the least shadow of sin, and was never possessed by the infernal serpent. And therefore, St. Augustine says: "the Son of God never made Himself a more worthy dwelling than Mary, who was never possessed by the enemy, nor despoiled of her ornaments." On the other hand St. Cyril of Alexandria asks: "Who ever heard of an architect who built himself a temple, and yielded up the first possession of it to his greatest enemy?"

Yes, says St. Methodius, speaking on the same subject, that Lord Who commanded us to honour our parents, would not do otherwise, when He became Man, than observe it, by giving His Mother every grace and honour: "He Who said, *Honour thy father and thy mother*, that He might observe His own decree, gave all grace and honour to His Mother." Therefore we must certainly believe that Jesus Christ preserved the body of Mary from corruption after death; for if He had not done so, He would not have observed the law, which, at the same time that it commands us to honour our mother, forbids us to show her disrespect. But how little would Jesus have guarded His Mother's honour, had He not preserved her from Adam's sin! "Certainly that son would

sin," says the Augustinian Father Thomas of Strasburg, "who, having it in his power to preserve his mother from original sin did not do so." "But that which would be a sin in us," continues the same author, "would certainly have been considered un-becoming in the Son of God, Who, whilst He could make His Mother immaculate, did it not." "Ah, no," exclaims Gerson, "since Thou, the supreme Prince, choosest to have a Mother, certainly Thou owest her honour. But now if Thou didst permit her, who was to be the dwelling-place of the all-pure God, to be in the abomination of original sin, certainly it would appear that the law was not well fulfilled."

"Moreover, we know," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "that the Divine Son came into the world to redeem Mary more than all other creatures." There are two means by which a person may be redeemed, as St. Augustine teaches us: the one by raising him up after having fallen, and the other by preventing him from falling; and this last means is doubtless the more honourable. "He is more honourably redeemed," says the learned Suarez, "who is prevented from falling, than he who, after falling, is raised up"; for thus the injury or stain, which the soul always contracts in falling, is avoided. This being the case, we ought certainly to believe that Mary was redeemed in the more honourable way, and the one more becoming to the Mother of God, as St. Bonaventure remarks, "for it is to be believed that the Holy Ghost, as a very special favour, redeemed and preserved her from original sin by a new kind of sanctification, and this in the very moment of her Conception; not that sin was in her, but that it might otherwise have been." On the same subject Cardinal Cusano beautifully remarks, that "others had Jesus as a liberator, but to the most Blessed Virgin He was a pre-liberator"; meaning, that all others had a Redeemer Who delivered them from sin with which they were already defiled, but that the most Blessed Virgin had a Redeemer Who, because He was to become her Son, preserved her from ever being defiled by sin.

In fine, to conclude in the words of Hugo of St. Victor, the tree is known by its fruits. If the Lamb was always immaculate, the Mother must also have been always immaculate: "Such the Lamb, such the Mother of the Lamb; for the tree is known by

its fruits." Hence this same Doctor salutes Mary, saying: "O worthy Mother of a worthy Son"; meaning, that no other than Mary was worthy to be the Mother of such a Son, and no other than Jesus was a worthy Son of such a Mother; and then he adds these words: "O fair Mother of Beauty itself, O high Mother of the Most High, O Mother of God!" Let us then address this most Blessed Mother in the words of St. Ildephonsus: "Suckle, O Mary, thy Creator, give milk to Him Who made thee, and Who made thee such that He could be made of thee." Amen.

Evening Meditation

IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE HOLY GHOST SHOULD PRESERVE MARY FROM ORIGINAL SIN.

I.

My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up (Cant. iv. 12).

Since it was becoming that the Eternal Father should preserve Mary from sin as His daughter, and the Son as His Mother, it was also becoming that the Holy Ghost should preserve her as His Spouse. St. Augustine says that "Mary was that only one who merited to be called the Mother and Spouse of God." For St. Anselm asserts that the Divine Spirit, the Love itself of the Father and the Son, came corporally into Mary, and enriching her with singular grace above all creatures, rested in her and made her the Queen of Heaven and earth. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee* (Luke i. 35).

And now, had an excellent artist the power to make his bride in reality such as he would represent her in his picture, what pains would he not take to render her as beautiful as possible! Who, then, can say that the Holy Ghost did otherwise with Mary, when He could make her, who was to be His Spouse, as beautiful as it was becoming that she should be? Ah no, the Holy Ghost acted as it became Him to act, for this same Lord declares: *Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee* (Cant. iv. 7).

The Holy Ghost signifies the same thing when He called this His Spouse an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain: *My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up* -- a Spouse into whom no guile could enter, against whom no fraud of the enemy

could prevail, and who was always holy in mind and body. "Thou art," says St. Bernard, "an enclosed garden into which has never entered the hand of sinners to pluck its flowers."

Ah, my immaculate Queen, fair dove, beloved of God, disdain not to cast thine eyes on the many stains and wounds of my soul. See me and pity me. God Who loves thee much, denies thee nothing, and thou knowest not how to refuse those who have recourse to thee. O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

II.

In Proverbs we read: *Many daughters have gathered together riches, thou hast surpassed them all* (Prov. xxxi. 29). If Mary has surpassed all others in the riches of grace, she must have had original justice as Adam and the Angels had it. In the Canticles we read: *There are young maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one* (in the Hebrew it is *my entire, my immaculate one*) *is but one. She is the only one of her mother* (Cant. vi. 7). All souls are daughters of divine grace, but amongst these Mary was the *dove* without the gall of sin, the *perfect one* without spot in her origin, the *one* conceived in grace.

Hence it is that the Angel, before she became the Mother of God, found her already *full of grace*, and saluted her: *Hail, full of grace!* (Luke i. 28). Grace was given partially to other Saints, but to the Blessed Virgin all grace was given. So much so that St. Thomas says: "Grace rendered not only the soul but even the flesh of Mary holy, so that the Blessed Virgin might be able to clothe the Eternal Word with it."

O immaculate and entirely pure Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Universe, our own good Lady, thou art the advocate of sinners, the consolation of the world, the ransom of captives, the joy of the sick, the comfort of the afflicted, the refuge and salvation of the whole world. O most pure Virgin Mary, I venerate thy most holy heart which was the delight and resting-place of God, thy heart overflowing with humility, purity and divine love. Ah, my Mother, for the love of Jesus, take charge of my salvation. O Lady, deny not thy compassion to one to whom Jesus has not denied His Blood. O my Mother, abandon me not! Never, never cease to pray for me until thou

seest me safe in Heaven at thy feet, blessing and thanking thee for ever. Amen.

First Friday of December

Morning Meditation

THE BITTERNESS OF THE HEART OF JESUS IN THE WOMB OF HIS MOTHER

The Devotion of all devotions is love for Jesus Christ, and frequent meditation on the love which this amiable Redeemer has borne and still bears us. Let us consider the sufferings which the Heart of Jesus endured for us even from His Infancy, for then we shall be unable to love anything else but the Heart which hath loved us so much.

I.

Consider the great bitterness with which the Heart of the Infant Jesus must have felt itself afflicted and oppressed, in the womb of Mary, at the very first moment when His Father proposed for His consideration all the series of contempt, sorrow and agonies which He was to suffer during His life, to deliver men from their miseries: *In the morning he wakeneth my ear ... And I do not resist ... I have given my body to the strikers* (Is. l. 4, 6). Thus did Jesus speak by the mouth of the Prophet. *In the morning he wakeneth my ear*. That is to say: From the first moment of My conception My Father made Me feel that it was His will that I should lead a life of sorrow and in the end should be sacrificed upon a Cross. *And I do not resist ... I have given my body to the strikers*. All this I have accepted for your salvation, O ye souls of men! From that time forth I gave up My Body to the scourges, to the nails, and to the death of the Cross!

My beloved Redeemer, how much did it not cost Thee, even from Thy first entrance into the world, to raise me from the mire into which I have fallen by my sins! Thou didst consent to be treated as the lowest of slaves in order to deliver me from the slavery of the devil, to whom I had willingly sold myself by sin. Yet, knowing all this, I have had the boldness continually to afflict Thy most amiable Heart which has loved me so much! But since Thou, Who art innocent, and art my God, hast accepted such a painful life and death, I will accept for Thy love, O my

Jesus, every trouble that shall come from Thy hands. I accept and embrace it because it comes from these hands once pierced through in order to deliver me from the hell which I have so often deserved. O my Lord, give me Thy holy love in order to render all sufferings and ignominy sweet and pleasant to me.

Most holy Mary, recommend me to thy Son for the love that thou bearest Him. Behold, I am one of those sheep for whom thy Son has died!

II.

Reflect that whatever Jesus Christ suffered in His life and in His Passion, was all placed before Him while He was yet in the womb of His Mother, and He accepted all with love. But in accepting all this, and in overcoming the natural repugnance of the senses, O God, what anguish and oppression did not the innocent Heart of Jesus suffer! Well did He understand what He was to endure; first of all shut up for nine months in the dark prison of the womb of Mary; then in enduring the shame and the sufferings of His birth; being born in a cold grotto that was a stable for beasts; in having afterwards to lead for thirty years a despised life in the shop of an artizan; and in seeing that He was to be treated by men as ignorant, a slave, a seducer, and one guilty of death, and that the most infamous and painful death allotted to criminals.

All this did our loving Redeemer accept every moment, but at each moment that He accepted it, He suffered at once all the pains and humiliations that He was afterwards to endure even until His death. The very knowledge of His divine dignity made Him feel, still more, the insults that He was to receive from men: *All the day long my shame is before me* (Ps. xliii. 16). He had continually before His eyes His shame, especially that confusion He should one day feel at seeing Himself stripped naked, scourged, and suspended by three nails, and so end His life in the midst of the insults and curses of those very men for whom He was dying: *Becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8). And why? To save us miserable and ungrateful sinners.

O loving Heart of Jesus, that loves men with so much tenderness and is so little loved by men -- do Thou apply a remedy to such great ingratitude! Inflammé our hearts with a true love for

Thee. Ah, why can I not go through the whole world to make known the graces, the sweetness, the treasures that Thou dispensest to those who truly love Thee! Accept the desire I have of seeing all hearts burning with love for Thee: O divine Heart, be Thou my consolation in trials, my repose in labour, my solace in anxieties, my haven in tempests. I consecrate to Thee my body and my soul, my heart and my life, all that I am. To Thee I offer all my thoughts, all my affections, all my desires. O Eternal Father, I offer to Thee the pure affections of the Heart of Jesus. If Thou dost reject mine, Thou canst not reject Thy Son's. Blessed art thou O immaculate Mary, who hadst thy heart always and entirely united to the Heart of Jesus, obtain for me that in future I may wish and desire only what Jesus wills and what thou wilt. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

BEHOLD THE HEART THAT HAS LOVED MEN SO MUCH.

As has been already said the Devotion of all devotions is love for Jesus Christ, and frequent meditation on the love which this amiable Redeemer has borne us and still bears us.

A devout author laments, and most justly, the sight of so many persons who pay much attention to the practice of various devotions, but neglect this; of so many preachers and confessors who say a great many things but speak so little of love for Jesus Christ; whereas love for Jesus Christ ought to be the principal, indeed the only, devotion of a Christian. Therefore the only object and care of preachers and confessors towards their hearers and penitents ought to be to recommend to them constantly, and to inflame their hearts with, the love of Jesus Christ. This neglect is the reason why souls make so little progress in virtue, and remain grovelling in the same defects, and even frequently relapse into grievous sins because they take but little care, and are not sufficiently admonished to acquire the love of Jesus Christ, which is that golden cord which unites and binds the soul to God.

For this sole purpose did the Eternal Word come into this world, to make Himself loved. *I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Luke xii. 49). For this purpose did the Eternal Father send Him into the world in order

that He might make known to us His love, and thus obtain ours in return; and He protests that He will love us in the same proportion that we love Jesus Christ: *For the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me* (Jo. xvi. 27).

Moreover, He gives us His graces as far as we ask for them in the Name of His Son: *If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you*. And He will admit us to the eternal beatitude in so far as He finds us conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. *For whom he foreknew he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his son* (Rom. viii. 29). But we shall never acquire this conformity, nor even ever desire it, if we are not given to meditation upon the love which Jesus Christ has borne us.

For this same purpose it is related in the Life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a nun of the Order of the Visitation, that our Saviour revealed His wish to this His servant, that in our times the Devotion and Feast of the Sacred Heart should be established and propagated in the Church. In this way, devout souls would, by their adoration and prayer, make reparation for the injuries His Heart constantly receives from ungrateful men when He is exposed in the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar. It is also related that while this devout virgin was one day praying before the Most Holy Sacrament, Jesus Christ showed her His Heart surrounded by thorns, with a cross on the top and in a throne of flames, and He spoke thus to her: "Behold the Heart that has so much loved men, and has spared nothing for love of them, even to consuming Itself to give them pledges of Its love, but Which receives from the majority of mankind no other recompense but ingratitude and insults towards the Sacrament of My Love: and what grieves Me most is that hearts consecrated to Me treat Me thus."

Then He urged her to use her utmost endeavours to secure that a particular Feast, the First Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, should be celebrated in honour of His Divine Heart. And this for three reasons: (1) In order that the faithful might return thanks to Him for the great Gift which He has left them in the Adorable Eucharist. (2) In order that loving souls might make amends by their prayers and pious affections for the irreverences and insults which He has received and still receives

from sinners in the Most Holy Sacrament. (3) In order that they might make reparation for the neglect He meets with in so many churches where He is so little adored and revered.

He promised that He would endow with the riches of His Sacred Heart those who should render Him this honour, both on the day of this Feast, and on every other day when they should visit Him in the Most Holy Sacrament.

Evening Meditation

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH (Jo. i. 14).

God sent the Archangel Gabriel to ask Mary's consent that He should become her Son; Mary gives her consent, and behold the Word is made Man. O wonderful prodigy at which the heavens and all nature stand in astonishment! The Word made flesh! A God made Man! What if we were to see a king become a worm, to save the life of a little worm of earth by his death?

Behold the only-begotten Son of God, omnipotent and true God, equal to the Father, born a little Infant in a stable. *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men* (Phil. ii. 7). If any one would see a God annihilated, let him enter into the Cave of Bethlehem, and he will find Him as a little Infant, bound in swaddling-clothes, so that He cannot move, and weeping and trembling with cold. Ah, holy Faith, tell me whose Son is this poor Child? Faith answers: He is the Son of God, and He is true God. And what has brought Him to so miserable a condition? It is the love He had for men. And yet there are men to be found who do not love this God!

O amiable Infant, though I see Thee in this cavern lying on straw poor and despised, yet Faith teaches me that Thou art my God, Who camest down from Heaven for my salvation. I acknowledge Thee, then, for my sovereign Lord and Saviour; but I have nothing alas to offer Thee. I have no gold of love, because I have loved creatures; I have loved my own caprices, and I have not loved Thee, O amiable Infinite One! I have not the incense of prayer, because I have lived in a miserable state of forgetfulness of Thee. I have no myrrh of mortification, for I have often displeased Thy infinite goodness in order not to be deprived of my miserable pleasures. What then shall I offer Thee? I offer Thee my heart, soiled and poor as it is; do Thou accept it and

change it.

II.

Behold the end for which the Son of God willed to be born an Infant, to give Himself to us from His Childhood, and thus to draw to Himself our love. Why, asks St. Francis de Sales, does Jesus take the sweet and tender form of an Infant, if it be not to stimulate us to love Him and to confide in Him? St. Peter Chrysologus had said before: "Thus He willed to be born, because He wished to be loved."

Oh, dear Child Jesus, my Saviour, I love Thee, in Thee do I trust. Thou art all my hope and all my love. What would have become of me if Thou hadst not come down from Heaven to save me? I know the hell which would have awaited me for the offences I have offered Thee. Blessed be Thy mercy, because Thou art ever ready to pardon me if I repent of my sins. Yes, I repent with all my heart, my Jesus, of having despised Thee. Receive me into Thy favour, and make me die to myself to live only to Thee, my only Good. Thou camest into the world for this purpose, to wash the hearts of men from their sins by Thy Blood and thus change them from sinners into saints. Give me the gold of Thy holy love; give me the spirit of holy prayer, give me the desire and strength to mortify myself in everything that displeases Thee. I am resolved to obey Thee and to love Thee; but Thou knowest my weakness, oh, give me the grace to be faithful to Thee! Most holy Virgin, thou who didst welcome with such affection and didst console the holy Magi, do thou welcome and console me also, who come to visit thy Son and to offer myself to Him. O my Mother, I have great confidence in thy intercession! Do thou recommend me to Jesus. To thee do I entrust my soul and my will; bind them forever to the love of Jesus!

Monday--First Week After Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE BODY IN THE GRAVE

Christian soul, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave. Contemplate there, dust, ashes, worms -- and sigh!" O God, that body pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp -- see to what it is reduced! The worms, after hav-

ing consumed all the flesh, devour one another, and in the end nothing remains but a fetid skeleton.

I.

Behold how the corpse first turns yellow and then black. Afterwards the entire body is covered with a white disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton which in the course of time falls to pieces. The bones separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind* (Dan. ii. 35). Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman who was the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armour, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God, that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye Saints, who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God Whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights! Now your bones are honoured as sacred Relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, awaiting the last day on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. True love for the body consists in treating it here with rigour and contempt, that hereafter it may be happy, and in now refusing it all pleasures which may make it miserable for eternity.

Behold, then, O my God, to what this body by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced! To worms and

rottenness! This does not afflict me; on the contrary I rejoice that this flesh of mine which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is that to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catherine of Genoa: *My Jesus, no more sins! No more sins!* I will no longer abuse Thy patience. I will not wait till the hour of death to begin to love Thee. From this moment I love Thee. I embrace Thee and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never again to depart from Thee. O most holy Virgin, bind me to Jesus Christ and obtain for me the grace never to lose Him more.

II.

In this picture of death behold yourself, and what you must one day become. *Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.* Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a Saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother and my sister* (Job, xvii. 14).

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you must of necessity die. If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done? Now that you are alive, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm, and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. "Look at the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame!" says St. Bernard. "Look at the sins of your manhood, and weep! Look at the disorders of your present life, and tremble!"

When St. Camillus of Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these could return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And I, who have time, -- what do I do for my soul? This the Saint said through humility. But you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the barren fig-tree of which the Lord spoke: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking*

fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none (Luke, xiii. 7). You have been in this world for more than three years, and what fruit have you produced? Remember, says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit by the time which God in His mercy gives you. Do not wait until you shall crave for time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told: *Time shall be no more* (Apoc. x. 6). Depart! The time for leaving this world has arrived. What is done, is done!

Behold, O my God, I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee: *Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?* (Luke, xiii. 7). Yes; during the many years which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briars and thorns of sin. But, O Lord, Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. I seek Thee, O my God, and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I am sorry with my whole heart. I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee, but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee. O Mary, my great advocate, do thou also listen to my cry and pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

ORIGINAL SIN

To fulfil his duties in life, it is necessary for man to know what is his Last End in which he may find his perfect happiness. Man's Last End is to love and serve God in this life, and to enjoy Him for eternity in the next. Thus, God has placed us in this world not to acquire riches, honours and pleasures, but to obey His Commandments, and, by observance of them, to gain the eternal Beatitude of Paradise.

For this end the Lord created Adam who was the first man, and gave him Eve for his wife, that from them mankind might be propagated. He created them in sanctifying grace, and placed them in the terrestrial paradise, with the promise that they should be thence transferred to Heaven to enjoy complete

and eternal felicity. During their sojourn on this earth God gave them for their food all the fruits of that garden of delights; but, to try their obedience, He forbade them to eat the fruit of only one tree which He pointed out to them. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit. For this sin they were deprived of divine grace, were instantly banished from Paradise, and as rebels to the divine Majesty, were with all their posterity condemned to temporal and eternal death. Thus was Heaven shut against them and all their descendants.

This is the *Original sin* in which, as children of a rebellious father, we are all born children of wrath and enemies of God. When a vassal rebels against his sovereign, all the descendants of the rebel become hateful to the prince and are banished from the kingdom. Thus Original sin, by the disobedience of Adam, deprives us all of the grace of God.

According to the doctrine of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary had the privilege of being exempt from this Original guilt. It is certain that she was also free from all actual sin. Such is the doctrine of the Church, as the Council of Trent has declared: "If any one saith that a man once justified ... is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial -- except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin -- let him be anathema." But if Mary contracted no guilt from which she required to be redeemed, must it be said that she was not redeemed by Jesus Christ as all the other children of Adam? No; she was redeemed, but redeemed in a more excellent manner. Others are redeemed *after having incurred Original guilt*; Mary was redeemed *by being preserved from it*. And this privilege was justly given to her alone -- that blessed Woman whom God had predestined to be His own Mother. Still more was it becoming that God should preserve Mary from Original sin, for He destined her to crush the head of that infernal serpent, which, by seducing our first parents, entailed death upon all men: and this the Lord foretold: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head* (Gen. iii. 15). But if Mary was to be that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her, and make her his slave; but it

was reasonable that she should be preserved from all stain, and even momentary subjection to her opponent. The proud spirit endeavoured to infect the most pure soul of this Virgin with his venom, as he had already infected the whole human race. But praised and ever blessed be God, Who in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed her for this purpose with such great grace, that remaining always free from guilt of any sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound his pride, as an ancient author writes: "Since the devil is the head of Original sin, this head it was that Mary crushed: for sin never had any entry into the soul of this Blessed Virgin, which was consequently free from all stain." And St. Bonaventure more expressly says: "It was becoming that the Blessed Virgin Mary, by whom our shame was to be blotted out, and by whom the devil was to be conquered, should never, not even for a moment, have been under his dominion."*

*In the Bull "Ineffabilis Deus" Pius IX, in the year 1854, solemnly defined as an Article of Faith that the Most Blessed Virgin was from the first moment of her conception preserved by God from all stain of Original Sin. More than 100 years before the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pius IX St. Alphonsus bound himself by vow to defend it. -- EDITOR.

With the one exception of God's glorious Mother all the rest of mankind are born infected with the sin of Adam, in punishment of which our understanding is darkened to the knowledge of Eternal Truth and our will inclined to evil. But by the merits of Jesus Christ we obtain at our Baptism Divine Grace and the remedy for all our miseries. We thus become the adopted sons of God and heirs of Paradise provided we persevere till death in the Grace of God. If we lose Divine Grace by mortal sin, and do not receive pardon, we shall be condemned to hell. We can obtain the pardon of mortal sin in the Sacrament of Penance.

Evening Meditation

THE GREAT DIGNITY AND ADVANTAGES OF A SOUL IN GOD'S GRACE

I.

If, says the Lord, thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth (Jer. xv. 19). They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God "Who

knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." Let us consider how great a good it is to be in the grace of God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof* (Job xxxviii. 13). Hence they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure! But it is an infinite treasure which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. *For*, says the Wise Man, *she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God* (Wis. vii. 14). Hence a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of Faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they, guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise. But God has declared in several places in the Holy Scriptures, that by means of grace we become His friends if we observe His Law. *You are my friends if you do the things that I command you. I will not now call you servants ... but I have called you friends* (Jo. xv. 14, 15). Hence, St. Gregory exclaims: "O Goodness of God! We do not deserve to be called even servants and He condescends to call us friends!"

How fortunate would the man esteem himself who should have a king for his friend! In a vassal it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign, but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. The most men can expect to gain in the service of an emperor is to become his friends; and should they succeed in gaining his friendship, they will expose their eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty I can ever become the friend of Caesar, but if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God.

Whosoever is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the child of God: *You are gods and the sons of the Most High* (Ps. lxxxi. 6). This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. *Behold*, says St. John, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God* (1 Jo. iii. 1). Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith* (Osee, ii. 20). Lastly, the soul in grace is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving Baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of Angels.

Therefore, O my God, when my soul had the happiness of being in grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple; but by committing sin, it lost all and became Thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I love Thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy Mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face, but by the Sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has merited for me mercy and pardon. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary, pray for me and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy God and mine.

II.

St. Thomas of Aquinas says that the gift of God's grace surpasses all created nature since it is a participation of the divine nature. And St. Peter said the same: *that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature* (2 Pet. i. 4). Such great things Jesus Christ merited for us by His Passion: He has even communicated to us the same splendour that He received from the Father. *And the glory which thou hast given to me, I have given to them* (John xvii. 22). In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one with God. *He*, says St. Paul, *that is joined to the Lord is one spirit* (Cor. vi. 17). The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him* (John xiv. 23).

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God Himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou! How beautiful art thou!* (Cant. iv. 1). The Lord appears never to take His eyes off the soul that loves Him, nor to close His ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers* (Ps. xxxiii. 16). St. Bridget used to say that one could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God and not die for very joy. And St. Catherine of Sienna seeing a soul in the state of grace,

said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in Heaven. A certain Lay-Brother of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second of Spain were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in Heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys even in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps. xxxiii. 9). The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law* (Ps. cxviii. 165). The peace of a soul united with God, surpasses all the pleasures of the senses and the world. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7).

O my Jesus, Thou art the good Shepherd, Who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me. Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me Thy grace which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the Cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. And since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me to embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve

Thee only: let others say and do what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy grace without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy Blood. Mary, my hope, assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

Tuesday--First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

Who is the man that shall live and not see death? The sentence has been already passed. Fire, water, the sword and the power of princes, says St. Augustine, may be resisted, but *death* -- who shall resist it? *It is appointed unto men once to die.*

I.

The Sentence of Death has been written against all men. You are a man, you must therefore die. "Our other good and evil things," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain." It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be rich or poor; whether he will have good or bad health; whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says: "Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted; but *death*, who shall resist it?" It is related that at the end of his life a certain king of France said: "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one hour longer for me." When the end of life arrives, it is not delayed a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed* (Job xiv. 5).

Dearly beloved Christian, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last hour for you. For me who am now writing, and for you who read this little book, the day and the moment have been decreed when I shall no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death?* (Ps. lxxxviii. 49). The sentence has been already passed.

Unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold those years are already past: death is perhaps at hand, and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for Heaven, I have burdened my soul with debts to divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, do Thou tell me, O my God, what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee? I am sorry for them and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so; but I have violated my promises. Receive back the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet, that loves Thee and asks Thy mercy.

II.

There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last Century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country, and of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription which only serves to teach us that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust inclosed in a tomb. "Tell me," says St. Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms."

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here, were it possible to be happy without God, if hereafter you should be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction, but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others, but death

will come and reduce you to the level of the humblest peasant.

O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love! I love Thee, O My Jesus. I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give me perseverance in obeying Thy commands. Give me Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. Mary, my Mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself; to thee I consign my soul. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

ACTUAL SINS

With regard to the sins that men actually commit, we must distinguish between *mortal* and *venial* sins.

1. To understand the nature of *mortal sin*, it is necessary to know that as the soul gives life to the body, so the grace of God gives life to the soul. Hence as the body without the soul is dead, and only fit for the grave, so by sin the soul dies to the grace of God and is doomed to be buried in hell. Hence grievous sin is called *mortal* because it *kills* the soul. *The soul that sinneth, the same shall die* (Ezech. xviii. 20). I said that the soul is doomed to hell. But what is this hell? It is a place to which all who die in mortal sin go to suffer eternal torments. *These shall go into everlasting punishment* (Matt. xxv. 46). And what pains shall they suffer in hell? Every conceivable pain. There the damned are immersed in a sea of fire, tortured by all sorts of torments, overwhelmed with despair, and abandoned for all eternity.

But is it reasonable, some one will say, that a soul should suffer an eternity of torments for a single mortal sin? He who speaks thus shows that he does not understand what a mortal sin is. Mortal sin is a turning of the back upon God. Thus it is defined by St. Thomas and St. Augustine, as a turning away from

the unchangeable Good. Hence God says to the sinner, *Thou hast forsaken me; thou hast gone backward* (Jer. xv. 6). Mortal sin is an insult offered to God by sinners. *I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me* (Is. i. 2). It is a dishonour done to the divine Majesty. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonour-est God* (Rom. ii. 23). It is to say to God: I will not obey Thee! *Thou hast broken my yoke,... and thou saidst, I will not serve* (Jer. ii. 20). This is the essence of mortal sin; and for it one hell is not enough: a hundred or a thousand hells would not be sufficient to punish a single mortal sin. If a person unjustly injures a peasant he deserves to be punished. If he does it to a nobleman, a prince, or an emperor, he merits far greater chastisement. But what are all the kings of the earth and even all the Saints of Heaven in comparison with God? They are as nothing. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all* (Is. xl. 17). Now, I ask, what chastisement is due to one who insults God, and a God Who has died for the love of us?

However, it must be observed that to make a sin mortal three things are required: *full advertence, perfect consent, and grievous matter*. If any of these three be wanting, the sin is not mortal. It can be only venial, or perhaps no sin at all.

2. *Venial sin* does not kill the soul, but it wounds it. Venial sin is not a grievous offence, but still it is an offence against God. It is not as great an evil as mortal sin; but it is a greater evil than all the evils that can happen to creatures. A lie, a venial curse, is a greater evil than if all men, all the Saints, and all the Angels were to be sent to hell.

Some venial sins are deliberate, others are indeliberate.

Indeliberate venial sins, or sins committed without full advertence or perfect consent, are less culpable. All men fall into such sins. The Blessed Virgin only had the privilege of being exempt from them.

Deliberate venial sins, which are committed with full advertence and consent, are more criminal, particularly when there is an affection for them; such as certain feelings of hatred, of ambition, certain rooted attachments, and the like. "Who," says St. Basil, "shall dare to call any sin light?" It is enough to understand that it offends God, to make us avoid it more than any other evil.

The deformity of a venial sin was once shown to St. Catherine of Genoa; she afterwards felt surprised that she did not die of horror at the sight of it. And let him who thinks lightly of venial sin remember, that if he does not amend, he will soon be on the brink of some mortal sin. The more venial sins the soul commits, the weaker she becomes, the greater the power which the devil acquires over her, and the fewer the graces that God bestows upon her. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little* (Ecclus. xix. 1).

Let us, then, be careful to avoid sin, which alone can make us unhappy in this life and in the next; and let us continually thank the goodness of God for not having already sent us to hell for our sins. Let us henceforth attend to the salvation of our souls, and let us consider how little is all we do for our salvation; how little is all we do for eternal life.

But, to make sure of our eternal salvation, it is not enough *to begin*: it is necessary *to persevere*; and in order to persevere, it is necessary to be humble, always distrusting our own strength, confiding only in God, and continually asking His help to persevere. Woe to the man who trusts in himself and glories in his own good works.

Evening Meditation

THE MISERY OF A SOUL IN SIN

I.

Consider the misery of a soul at enmity with God. She is separated from God her Sovereign Good. *Your iniquities*, says the Prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God* (Is. lix. 2). Hence the soul is no longer God's, and God is no longer hers. *You are not my people and I will not be yours* (Osee, i. 9). And the soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates her and condemns her to hell. God does not hate His creatures. He does not hate wild beasts, the viper or the toad. *Thou lovest all things that are and hatest none of the things which thou hast made* (Wis. xi. 25). But He cannot refrain from hating sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity* (Ps. v. 7). Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to His will; and in hating sin He must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike* (Wis. xiv. 9).

O God! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep, he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can escape the hand of God? *If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall thy hand lead me* (Ps. cxxxviii. 8, 10).

Behold, O my Redeemer, the miserable state to which I have brought myself! To make me worthy of Thy grace, Thou didst spend thirty-three years in toil and pains; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank Thy mercy which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do everything in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain Thy pardon. Dost Thou wish me to repent? O my Jesus! I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite Goodness. Dost Thou wish me to love Thee? I love Thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day forward I will live only for Thee. I will love only Thee my God, my Treasure, my Hope, my Strength. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength* (Ps. xvii. 2).

II.

Poor sinners! They are cursed by God, cursed by the Angels, cursed by the Saints, cursed also every day on earth by all Priests and Religious, who, in reciting the Divine Office, proclaim them accursed. *They are cursed who decline from thy commandments* (Ps. cxviii. 21). Moreover, that soul that is at enmity with God has lost all its merits. Should a man be equal in merit to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merit all the other Apostles, -- that man, if he commit a single mortal sin, loses all. *All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered* (Ezech. xviii. 24). Behold the ruin which mortal sin produces: it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; His beloved friend into an enemy whom He sovereignly hates; and the heir of

Heaven into one doomed to hell. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the Angels capable of weeping they would shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the great misfortune is that the Angels would weep, if it were in their power to do so, and the sinner himself weeps not! "A Christian," says St. Augustine, "if he loses a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps and sheds not a single tear."

Thy merits, Thy Wounds, O my Jesus, shall be my hope and my strength; from Thee I hope for strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me then, O my Redeemer, the gift of Thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from Thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with Thy holy love. Mary, my Mother, who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

Wednesday--First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"YESTERDAY FOR ME, TODAY FOR THEE."

Who can tell whether it will be either in a year, or within a month, or within a week, or even whether you will be alive tomorrow? "Yesterday for me, today for thee." O my Jesus, give me light and pardon me.

I.

It is appointed. It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter round the neck, and every step we make brings us nearer to death. As your name was one day inserted in the Register of Baptisms, so it shall be one day written in the records of the dead. As in speaking of those who have already departed you say: God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother, -- so others shall say the same of you. As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man on his way to the place of execution, jesting, laughing, gazing about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities and amusements?

And are not you now on your way to death? What are the objects of your thoughts? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives on whom justice has been already executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions hanging dead on the gibbet! Look, then, at these dead bodies. Each of them says to you: *Yesterday for me; today for thee* (Ecclus. xxxiii. 23). The same is said to you by the portraits of your deceased relatives, by the memorandum books, the houses, the beds, the garments which they have left. *Yesterday for me! Today for thee!*

My beloved Redeemer, I would not dare to appear before Thee, did I not see Thee hanging on the Cross lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great; but Thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous; but Thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy Wounds, Thy Blood, and Thy Death, are my hope. I deserve hell by my first sin; to that sin I have added so many other offences. And Thou hast not only preserved my life, but Thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that Thou wilt cast me away now that I love Thee and desire nothing but Thy grace? Yes, my dear Lord, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, and am sorry for having despised Thee, not so much because I have deserved hell, as because I have offended Thee, my God, Who hast loved me so tenderly.

II.

To know that you must die -- that after death you shall enjoy eternal glory, or suffer eternal torments -- that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery -- and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity those who meet with a sudden and unprovided death; why, then, do we ourselves not endeavour to be always prepared? We, too, may die suddenly and without preparation. Indeed sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or think not of it, we shall die and every hour, every moment, brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the infirmity that will send us out of this world.

In every age, houses, streets and cities are filled with new people; the former inhabitants have been borne away to the grave. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come when neither you nor I, nor anyone alive, shall live any longer on this earth. *Days shall be formed and no one in them* (Ps. cxxxviii. 16). We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights, or an eternal night of torments. There is no middle way. It is certain and of Faith that one or the other will be our lot.

O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of Thy goodness; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to Thee; change my whole heart. Grant that my heart, which once despised Thy love and exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely Thine, and may burn with continual flames of love for Thee. I hope to gain Paradise, that I may always love Thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent -- I must remain among the penitents; but though among these I wish to love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy mercy make all Heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all Thine and to think only of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and grace to execute this desire, which Thou in Thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary, thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to my promise.

Spiritual Reading

"THOU SHALT NOT HAVE STRANGE GODS BEFORE ME." (Exod. xx. 3).

The First Commandment obliges us to give to God due worship and honour. *What* this God is, it is impossible to understand. But let it be enough for us to know that His principal attributes are as follows:

1. God is *Independent*. All things depend on God, but He depends on no one; and, therefore, He possesses all perfections, in regard to which no one can set any bounds to Him.

2. God is *Almighty*. He can do whatever He wishes; by one act of His Will He created the world. He first created the heavens, and the Angels, who are pure spirits, and He created them in the state of grace. But Lucifer, when he was commanded to

adore the Son of God, Who was to be made man, through pride refused to obey, and induced a third part of the Angels to join with him in his rebellion against God. These rebellious angels were instantly banished from Heaven by the Archangel Michael, and condemned to hell. They are the devils, who tempt us to sin, in order to make us companions of their torments. Miserable should we be, if we had not God to assist us. We should not have strength to resist their temptations. But God requires, as the condition of giving us this assistance, that in our temptations we instantly turn to Him, and ask His assistance; if we act otherwise, we shall be defeated by our enemies. The Angels who remained faithful were immediately admitted into the enjoyment of the glory of Paradise; and from among these Angels, the Lord has appointed those who were to be our guardians: *He hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways* (Ps. xc. 11). Let us every day give thanks to our Angel Guardian, and entreat him to assist us always and never abandon us. Next the Lord created the earth and all those things that we see. He then made man, that is, Adam and Eve. So God is the Lord of all things, for He created all things; and as He created all things by one act of His Will, so by another act He can, if He pleases, destroy all things. This is what is meant by God's *Omnipotence*, -- that is, God is Almighty.

3. God is also *Most Wise*. He governs all things created without labour or inconvenience. He sees and has before Him all things, past and future, and knows all our thoughts better than they are known to ourselves.

4. God is *Eternal*. He always has been, and always will be and nothing in Him ever had a beginning, or shall have an end.

5. God is *Immense*. He is in Heaven, on earth and in all places.

6. God is *Holy* in all His works, and it is impossible for Him to be in any way evil.

7. God is *Just*. He leaves no sinful act unpunished, and no good act without its reward.

8. God is all *Mercy* to penitent sinners, and all *Love* to the souls that love Him. In a word, God is *Infinite Goodness*; so that He cannot be better or more perfect than He is.

This God, our Creator and Preserver, we are bound to love

and honour, principally by acts of the three Theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. "God," says St. Augustine, "is to be worshipped by Faith, Hope, and Charity."

Evening Meditation

THE SINNER INSULTS GOD.

I.

I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me. (Is. i. 2).

What does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin? He insults God. The malice of an insult is, St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives the insult and of the person who offers it. It is sinful to offend a peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God? *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings* (Apoc. xvii. 14). He is a Being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth and all the Saints and Angels are less than an atom of sand. *As a drop of a bucket ... as a little dust* (Is. xl. 15). And the Prophet Isaias adds, that compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all* (Is. xl. 17). Such is God. And what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms by which he shall be soon devoured. *He is miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked* (Apoc. iii. 17). Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing: he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! "Vile dust," says the same St. Bernard, "dares to provoke such tremendous majesty." The angelic Doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were infinite malice. And St. Augustine calls sin "an infinite evil." Hence were all men and Angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, such an offering would not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of hell; but all Theologians teach that *this chastisement is less than sin deserves*.

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord? God is the Lord of all because He has created all. *All things are in thy power ... Thou hast made heaven and earth and all things* (Esth. xiii, 9). All creatures obey God. *The winds and the*

sea obey him (Matt. viii. 27). *Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds fulfil his word* (Ps. cxlviii. 8). But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God: Lord, I will not serve Thee. *Thou hast broken my yoke; thou hast burst my bonds; thou saidst: I will not serve* (Jer. ii. 20). The Lord says to him: Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man answers: I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers: *Who is the Lord, that I should hear his voice? I know not the Lord* (Exod. v. 2). The sinner says the same: Lord, I know Thee not, I will do what I please.

Behold, O my God, at Thy feet the rash and daring rebel who has had the temerity and the audacity to insult Thee so often to Thy very face, and to turn his back upon Thee. Thou hast said: *Cry to me, and I will hear* (Jer. xxxiii. 3). Hell is too little for me; this I already know. But, remember, O Lord, that I am more sorry for having offended Thee Who art infinite Goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my very life. Ah, Lord, pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend Thee again.

II.

In a word, the sinner insults the Lord to His face, and turns his back upon Him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. Of this the Lord Himself complains. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward* (Jer. xv. 6). You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have turned your back upon me; you *are gone backward*. God has declared that He hates sin. Hence He cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike* (Wis. xiv. 9). In committing sin man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. *He hath*, says Job, *strengthened himself against the Almighty* (Job xv. 25). What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier? God is the Omnipotent Being Who by a nod has created Heaven and earth *out of nothing* (Mach. vii. 28). And if He wished, He could by another act of His will, destroy all creatures. *The Almighty Lord,*

who, at a beck, can utterly destroy ... the whole world (Ibid. viii. 18). In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arm against the Lord. *He hath, says Job, stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck* (Job xv. 25). He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance -- of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have committed? God is merciful. He pardons sinners.* What an insult to God! What temerity! What blindness!

Thou hast waited for me, O my God, that I may repent and forever bless Thy mercy and love Thee. Yes, I repent, I bless Thee, I love Thee and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from Thy love. Thy love has rescued me from hell; it is by Thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank Thee, my Lord, for the light and the desire Thou givest me to love Thee forever. Ah, take possession of my whole being -- of my soul and body -- of my powers and senses -- of my will and liberty. I am Thine -- save me. Thou art my only Good; Thou art alone amiable: mayest Thou also be my only Love. Give me fervour in loving Thee. I have offended Thee grievously. Hence it is not enough for me to love Thee. I wish to love Thee ardently in order to compensate for the injuries I have done Thee. From Thee Who art omnipotent I hope for this love. I also hope for it, O Mary, through thy prayers which are powerful with God.

Thursday--First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

MEMENTO MORI! REMEMBER DEATH!

Oh, how correctly men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! "Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world."

I.

Death is certain. But, O God, this truth Christians know, this they believe and see; and how can they still live so forgetful

of death as if they would never have to die? If after this life there were neither hell nor Heaven, could they think less of it than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. If you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. *O death, thy sentence is welcome* (Ecclus. xli. 3). Oh, how correctly do men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! "Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world." *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life* (1 John, ii. 16). All the goods of this earth are reduced to the pleasures of sense, to riches and honours. But all these are readily despised by the man who considers that after being the food of worms in the grave, he will soon be reduced to dust.

And in reality it was in view of death that the Saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a skull in order that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words, *Memento Mori! Remember Death!* The Venerable Father Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, "What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be." A holy hermit being asked when dying how he could be so cheerful, said: "I have always kept death before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new in it."

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me! I shall then find only the little I have done for Thee, O my God, and what do I wait for! Do I wait till death comes and finds me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity I should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus, I will not die in so sad a state. I thank Thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities and to love Thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love Thee above all things -- I love Thee more than my life.

II.

What folly would it not be for a traveller to think only of

acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he had to pass, and thus reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool who seeks after happiness in this world where he spends only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next where he must spend his eternity? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us: it is folly to set our heart on what we must soon give up. Death shall strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in a dying gasp, a funeral and a lowering into the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the Day of Judgment; thence it will go to Heaven or to hell, wheresoever the soul will have already gone.

Oh, my Jesus, I give myself entirely to Thee. From this moment I embrace and unite Thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to Thee. *Into thy hands I commend my spirit.* I will not wait to give it to Thee when that *Profisiscere*, "Depart, O soul," will announce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask Thee to save me. "Jesu, sis mihi Jesus." My Saviour, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of Thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration I am making may be the last call Thou wilt give me, and the last mercy Thou wilt show me? Extend Thy hand, O my Love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervour and make me do with great love all that Thou dost demand of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee ardently during the remainder of my life. O Mary, through the love which thou bearest to thy Jesus, obtain for me these two graces -- perseverance and love.

Spiritual Reading

FAITH

Faith is a virtue, or a gift that God infuses into our souls in Baptism; a gift by which we believe the Truths God Himself has revealed to the Holy Church, and which she proposes to our belief.

By the *Church* is meant the congregation of all who are *baptized* (for persons *not baptized* are out of the Church), and profess the true Faith under a visible Head, that is, the Sovereign Pontiff. I say the *true Faith*, to exclude heretics, who, though baptized, are separated from the Church! I say *under a visible head*, to exclude schismatics who do not obey the Pope, and on that account, easily pass from schism to heresy. St. Cyprian well says: "Heresies and schisms have no other origin than this -- the refusal to obey the Priest of God and the notion that there can be more than one Priest at one time presiding over the Church, and more than one Judge at a time filling the office of Vicar of Christ."

We have all revealed Truths in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Traditions gradually communicated by God to His servants. But how should we be able to ascertain what are the *true Traditions* and the *true Scriptures*, and what is their *true meaning*, if we had not the Church to teach us? This Church Jesus Christ established as *the pillar and the ground of the truth* (1 Tim. iii. 15). To this Church our Saviour Himself has promised that she shall never be conquered by her enemies. *The gates of hell shall not prevail against her* (Matt. xvi. 18). The gates of hell are the heresies and heresiarchs that have caused so many miserable, deluded souls to wander from the right way. This Church it is that teaches us, through her ministers, the truths that we are to believe. Thus, St. Augustine says: "I would not believe the Gospel, were I not moved by the authority of the Church."

THE MOTIVE OF FAITH, AND HOW WE SHOULD MAKE AN ACT OF FAITH.

The cause or motive, then, which imposes on me the obligation to believe the Truths of Faith is, because God, the infallible Truth, has revealed them, and because the Church proposes them to my belief. So we should make an Act of Faith in this way: "O my God, because Thou, Who art the infallible Truth, hast revealed to the Church the Truths of Faith, I believe all the Church proposes to my belief."

This is the reason or motive which makes me believe the Truths of revelation. Let us now see what are those Truths which we are obliged to believe.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTICLES OF FAITH

There are four principal Articles of Faith:

1. There is an ever-present God.
2. He is a Rewarder Who rewards with the eternal glory of Paradise all who observe His law, and punishes all who transgress it with the everlasting torments of hell.
3. In God there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these Persons, though distinct from one another, are but One God, because They are one Essence and one Divinity. Hence, as the Father is Eternal, Omnipotent, Infinite, so are the Son and the Holy Ghost equally Eternal, Omnipotent, and Infinite. The Son is begotten of the Intelligence of the Father. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Will of the Father and the Son, by the Love with which They love each other.
4. The Incarnation of the Eternal Word -- that is, of the Second Person -- the Son, Who, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was made man in the womb of the Virgin Mary -- for the Person of the Word assumed the nature of man, so that the two natures, the Divine and the human, were united in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for our salvation. But what necessity was there that Jesus Christ should suffer for our redemption? Man had sinned; and to obtain pardon it was necessary that man should make a full satisfaction to God for the sins that had been committed. But how could man make such satisfaction to the infinite majesty of God? What, then, did God do? The Father sent the Son to take upon Himself our nature; and the Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, atoned to the divine justice on behalf of man. Such is the debt and the love that we owe to Jesus Christ. Denis the Carthusian tells us of a young man who, at Mass, did not kneel down at the words of the Creed, *Et homo factus est*; upon which a devil with a club appeared to him, and said: "Thou ungrateful wretch, dost thou not thank the God Who was made flesh for thee? If He had done for us what He has done for thee, we should be always prostrate in thankful adoration. And thou dost not even make a sign of thankfulness." Then he gave him a terrible blow with his club and left him half dead.

Evening Meditation

*HE THAT LOVES GOD MUST LOVE, NOT ABHOR,
DEATH.*

How can he abhor death who is in the grace of God? *He that abideth in love dwelleth in God and God in him* (1 John, iv. 16). He, therefore, that loves God is secure of His grace, and dying thus he is sure of going to rejoice forever in the kingdom of the Blessed; and shall such a one fear death? David truly said: *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified* (Ps. cxlii. 2). This means that no man may presume to be saved by his own merits; for no one but Jesus and Mary can say that he has been without sin through life. Yet he ought not to fear death, if, with true repentance for his sins, he trusts in the merits of Jesus Christ Who came on earth to save sinners. *The Son of man came to save that which was lost* (Matt. xviii. 11). And for this end He died, and poured forth His Blood to save sinners. The Blood of Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, speaks better in favour of sinners than the blood of Abel spoke against Cain who slew him. (Heb. xii. 22).

It is true that, without a divine revelation, no man can possess an infallible certainty of his own salvation; but he that has given himself with a true heart to God, and is ready to lose everything, even life itself, rather than lose the divine grace, has a moral certainty that he will be saved. This certainty is founded on the divine promises. No man, says the Scripture, ever trusted in God and was confounded. Almighty God declares in many passages that He does not desire the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. *Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?* (Ezech. xviii. 23). In another place He makes the same declaration and adds an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live* (Ezech. xxxiii. 11). And God laments over those obstinate sinners who choose to perish because they will not leave their sins, and He says: *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* And to those who repent of their sins He promises to forget all their iniquities. *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed he shall live ... I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done* (Ezech. xviii.

21).

O my beloved Jesus and my Judge, when Thou dost judge me, for Thy mercy condemn me not to hell! In hell I could not love Thee, but should hate Thee forever; and how can I hate Thee Who art so worthy of love, and Who hast loved me? If Thou wilt condemn me to hell, at least grant me grace to be able to love Thee there with all my heart. This grace to love Thee I do not deserve through my sins, but if I do not deserve it, Thou hast purchased it for me with the Blood Thou didst shed with such anguish for me upon the Cross.

II.

When a sinner also hates the sins he has committed, it is a certain sign that he has been pardoned. A holy Father says that whoever can say, with truth: *I hate and abhor my iniquities* (Ps. cxviii. 163), may be certain that they are forgiven. We have another sign of pardon when we recover grace and persevere in a good life for a considerable time after having sinned. It is also a sure sign to the same effect when we have a fixed resolution to die rather than lose the friendship of God, as also when we earnestly desire to love Him, and to see Him loved by others, and when we feel distress at seeing Him offended.

How is it then, that certain great Saints after having given themselves wholly to God, and after a life of mortification and detachment from all earthly things, at the hour of death have felt great terror at the thought of appearing before Christ their judge? I reply that those great Saints who suffered these fears at the moment of death were very few, and that it was the will of God that they should thus purge away the remains of their sins before entering into eternal blessedness; but that generally speaking, all the Saints have died in remarkable peace, and with an earnest desire to depart to the presence of God. And besides, this is the difference between sinners and Saints at the hour of death: sinners pass from fear to despair, Saints from fear to confidence, and thus die in peace.

Therefore, every one who has a hope that he is in the grace of God ought to desire death, repeating the prayer which Christ has taught us: *Thy kingdom come!* And he ought to embrace death with joy when it comes that he may thus be freed from sin, and

leave this world where no one lives without imperfections, and go to behold God, face to face, and love Him with all his powers in the kingdom of love.

O my Judge, inflict on me every pain, but deprive me not of the power of loving Thee. O Mother of God, behold the peril in which I stand of being condemned to be unable to love thy Son Who deserves an infinite love! Help me; have pity on me. St. Joseph, my Protector, obtain for me a holy death. My Guardian Angel, St. Michael the Archangel, defend me from the evil one in the last conflict. My holy Patrons and all ye Saints in Paradise, succour me in that last hour. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, be with me in the hour of my death.

Friday--First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

Worldlings esteem happy only those who enjoy the pleasures, the riches and the pomps of this earth. But death puts an end to all these earthly goods. *For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.* O my Jesus, how often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee Who art an Infinite Good!

I.

For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while (James iv. 15). The vapours exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed in the light of the sun, make a splendid appearance, but how long does this splendour last? It vanishes before the first blast of wind. Behold that nobleman: today flattered and feared and almost adored; tomorrow dead, despised, reviled and trampled upon. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas a Kempis, took delight in speaking of a beautiful house which he had built for himself: a friend told him that it had one great defect. "What is it?" he asked. "It is," answered the other, "that you have made a door in it." "What!" rejoined the brother of a Kempis, "is a door a defect?" "Yes," answered the friend; "for through this door you must one day be carried dead and must leave house and all."

Death in a word, strips man of all this world's goods. Oh, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it; and to see others take possession of his furniture, his money, and all his other goods! The servants leave him in the grave with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions at death, that when his body should be carried to the place of burial a person should go before, holding a winding-sheet suspended from a pole and crying aloud: "This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave."

My Lord, since Thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee, Who art an Infinite Good! O Jesus, my heavenly Physician, cast Thine eyes upon my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. *If thou wishest thou canst make me clean* (Matt. viii. 2). I know that Thou art able and willing to heal me; but in order to heal me, Thou wishest me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against Thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in Thy power to heal me. *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee* (Ps. xl. 5).

II.

When the body of the prince is laid in the grave, his flesh drops off, and behold, his skeleton can no longer be distinguished from others. "Contemplate," says St. Basil, "the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been a master." Diogenes was one day seen by Alexander the Great seeking with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip your father. I am not able to distinguish it. If you can find it, show it to me." "Men," says Seneca, "are born unequal; but after death all are equal." And Horace says that death brings down

the sceptre to the level of the spade -- *Sceptra ligonibus aequat*. In a word, when death comes, *the end comes*; all ends, we leave all things; and of all we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

I have forgotten Thee, O Lord, but Thou hast not forgotten me; and now Thou makest me feel that Thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done Thee, if I detest them. *But if the wicked do penance ... I will not remember all his iniquities* (Ezech. xviii. 21). Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasure I have given Thee. For the future I will forfeit all things, even life, rather than forfeit Thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without Thy grace?

Ah, assist me! Thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. No, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of Thy love. Thou art my only Lord; Thou hast created and redeemed me; Thou hast loved me more than all others; Thou alone hast merited my love; Thee alone do I wish to love.

Spiritual Reading

THE THINGS THAT WE MUST KNOW AND BELIEVE--
SOME NECESSARY BY NECESSITY OF MEANS, AND
OTHERS BY NECESSITY OF PRECEPT

There are some Articles to be believed by *necessity of means* without which we cannot obtain salvation; others by *necessity of precept*. The necessity of *means* implies that if we do not believe certain Articles of Faith, we cannot be saved. The necessity of *precept* signifies that we must believe certain other Articles proposed to us by the Church, but if it happens that we are ignorant of them by invincible ignorance, we are excused from sin and may be saved.

1. To know and believe that there is a God, and that He is a just rewarder of virtue and punisher of vice, is certainly necessary as a *means of salvation*, according to the words of the Apostle, *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him* (Heb. xi. 6). Some authors hold that belief in the other two Articles -- the *Trinity of Persons* and the *Incarnation*

of the Word -- is necessary by *necessity of precept*, but not necessary as a *means of salvation*, so that a person inculpably ignorant of them may be saved. At any rate it is certain, as Innocent XI. declared (when condemning a contrary proposition), that he who is ignorant of the two Mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot receive absolution.

2. We are obliged only by necessity of *precept* (which, however, binds under grievous sin), to know and believe the other Articles of the Creed, at least the principal Articles among them -- such as that God has created Heaven and earth; that He preserves and governs the universe; that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the true Mother of God and is ever a Virgin; that on the third day after His death Jesus Christ rose from the dead by His own power; that He ascended into Heaven and there sits on the right hand of His Eternal Father. By this it is meant that Jesus Christ, even as Man, sits at the right hand of God -- that is, that He permanently possesses a glory equal to that of the Father, as Bellarmine explains. I said *even as Man*. For as God, Jesus Christ is in all things equal to the Father. As Man, He is, indeed, inferior to the Father, but because our Saviour is at the same time both *God* and *Man*, and only one Person, therefore the Humanity of Jesus Christ in Heaven has a glory and majesty equal to that of the Father, not by its own dignity, but because it is united with the Person of the Son of God. When a king sits on his throne, the regal purple that he wears is there with him; thus the Humanity of Christ by itself is not equal to God, but because it is united with a divine Person, it is seated on the same throne with God, with a glory equal to that of God.

We are also bound to know and believe that, on the last day of the world all men shall rise, and shall be judged by Jesus Christ. We must also believe that the *Roman Catholic Church* is the *only true Church*. Hence they who are out of our Church, or separated from it, cannot be saved, except infants who die after Baptism. We are obliged to believe in the Communion of Saints -- that is, that each of the faithful in the state of grace partakes of the merits of all the Saints living and dead. We must also believe in the remission of sins -- that is, that our sins are remitted in the Sacrament of Penance, provided we are sincerely penitent

for them. Lastly, we must believe in Eternal life -- that is, that he who is saved by dying in a state of grace will go to Heaven, where he will enjoy God for all eternity; and that he who dies in sin will be sent to hell, where he will be tormented for all eternity.

Moreover, every Christian is obliged to know the Precepts of the Decalogue and those of the Church, and the principal obligations of his own state of life, whether he be an ecclesiastic or secular, married or single, a lawyer, doctor, etc.

Every one is bound also to know and believe in the Seven Sacraments and their effects, particularly the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and Eucharist, and the other Sacraments when he is about to receive them.

All are obliged to know the *Our Father*. The "Our Father," or Lord's Prayer, is a prayer that Jesus Christ Himself composed, and left to us that we may know in what manner to ask the graces most necessary for our salvation. St. Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, on one occasion when he was ill, repeated the *Our Father* three hundred times in one night. His attendant advised him not to repeat it so often, for fear of increasing his illness. The Saint answered that the oftener he said it, the faster he recovered. It is particularly useful to repeat over and over again the words, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*; for the greatest grace that God can bestow upon us is to make us do His holy will here on earth. It is also very profitable to repeat the petition, *and lead us not into temptation*, begging the Lord to deliver us from the temptations in which He foresees that we should fall.

Moreover, every one should learn the *Hail Mary*, in order to know how to recommend ourselves to the Mother of God through whom, as St. Bernard says, we receive all the graces God gives us.

All should likewise know that there exists a Purgatory, a place for expiating sins after death, where the Faithful suffer for their sins those temporal punishments that they did not fully undergo in this life. We should, therefore, be mindful to pray and offer our suffrages for the Holy Souls in Purgatory whom we are, as far as we can, bound to relieve in their sufferings. Indeed the least pain in Purgatory is greater than all the pains of this life put

together, for the pains of these spouses of Christ are most intense, and these Poor Souls are unable to assist themselves. If on this earth, our neighbour were suffering great pain, and we could relieve him without any great inconvenience, should we not be obliged to do so? We are equally bound to render assistance to these Holy Souls, at least by our prayers.

We should also know that it is very useful to us to obtain the intercession of the Saints, and particularly of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is of Faith, as the Council of Trent has declared against the impious Calvin who said it was wrong to ask the assistance of the Saints. Nay, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, we mortals are absolutely bound to go to the Saints in order to obtain, through their intercession, the divine graces necessary for our salvation; not because God cannot save us without the intercession of the Saints, but because the order established by God requires that while we remain in this life we should be brought back to Him by the mediation and prayers of the Saints. This doctrine is also held by other Theologians. We should likewise venerate the Relics of the Saints, the Cross, and Sacred Images.

Evening Meditation

JESUS SATISFIES FOR OUR SINS.

Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way fastening it to the cross (Coloss. ii. 14).

The sentence was already recorded against us that was to condemn us to eternal death, as rebels against the offended Majesty of God. And what did Jesus Christ do? With His Blood He cancelled the writing of the condemnation, and, to deliver us from all fear, He fastened it to His own Cross on which He died to satisfy divine Justice for us. My soul, behold the obligation thou art under to thy Redeemer; and hear how the Holy Spirit now reminds thee: *Forget not the kindness of thy surety* (Ecclus. xxix. 20). Forget not the kindness of thy Surety, Who, taking upon Himself thy debts, hath paid them for thee; and behold, the pledge of the payment has been already fixed to the Cross. When, therefore, thou dost remember thy sins, look upon the Cross and have confidence. Look on that sacred wood red with

the Blood of the Lamb of God sacrificed for thy love, and hope in and love a God Who hath loved thee so much.

Yes, my Jesus, I hope for everything from Thy infinite goodness. It is of Thy divine nature to render good for evil to those who repent of their sins, who are sorry for having committed them, and love Thee. Yes, I am sorry above all things, my beloved Redeemer, for having despised Thy goodness so much, and, wounded by Thy love, I love Thee and I ardently desire to please Thee in everything that is Thy will. Alas! when I was in sin, I was the servant of the devil and he was my master. Now that I hope to remain in Thy grace, Thou alone, my Jesus, art the only Lord of my heart and my only Love. Take possession of me, then, and keep me always, possess me entirely, for Thine only do I desire to be. Nevermore will I forget the pains Thou hast suffered for me, so that I shall be more and more inflamed with Thy love. I love Thee, my most dear Redeemer; I love Thee, O Word Incarnate, my Treasure, my All. I love Thee! I love Thee!

II.

But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just, and he is the propitiation for our sins (1 Jo. ii. 1).

Oh, what great confidence do these words give to penitent sinners! Jesus Christ is in Heaven, advocating their cause, and He is certain to obtain pardon for them. The devil, when a sinner has escaped from his chains, tempts him to be diffident of obtaining pardon. But St. Paul encourages him, saying, *Who is he that shall condemn? Jesus Christ that died,... who also maketh intercession for us* (Rom. viii. 34). The Apostle means to say, that if we detest the sins we have committed, we should not fear. Who is He that will condemn us? Jesus Christ, the same Who died that we might *not* be condemned, and Who is now in Heaven advocating our cause. He goes on to say: *Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom. viii. 35). As if he would say: But, after we have been pardoned with so much love by Jesus Christ, and have been received into His grace, who could have the heart to turn his back upon Him and separate himself from His love?

No, my Jesus, I no longer rely upon myself so as to live separated from Thee and deprived of Thy love. I weep over the

unhappy days when I lived without Thy grace. Now I hope that Thou hast pardoned me. I love Thee and Thou lovest me. But Thou dost love me with a boundless love, and I love Thee so little. Give me more love. Infinite Goodness, I repent above all things for having hitherto so ill-treated Thee; now I love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself; and I delight more in knowing Thou art infinitely blessed, than in my own happiness, because Thou art worthy of infinite love. I deserve nothing but hell. My Jesus, I wish for nothing from Thee but Thyself.

Saturday--First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

MARY'S FAITH

St. Leo applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs: *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.* When the Disciples doubted, she did not doubt. She saw Jesus weep and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. She saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God. O Virgin Mary, increase our Faith!

I.

As the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of holy Love and Hope, so also is she the Mother of Faith: *I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope* (Ecclus. xxiv. 24). And with reason is she so, says St. Ireneus, for "the evil done by Eve's incredulity was remedied by Mary's Faith." This is confirmed by Tertullian who says that because Eve, contrary to the assurance that she had received from God, believed the serpent, she brought death into the world; but our Queen, because she believed the Angel when he said that she, remaining a virgin, would become the Mother of God, brought salvation into the world. For St. Augustine says that "when Mary consented to the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, by means of her Faith she opened Heaven to men." Richard of St. Laurence, on the words of St. Paul, *for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife* (Cor. vii. 14), says that "Mary is the believing woman by whose Faith the unbelieving Adam and all his posterity have

been saved." Hence on account of her Faith, Elizabeth called the holy Virgin blessed: *Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished in thee that were spoken by the Lord* (Luke i. 45). And St. Augustine adds, that Mary was more blessed in receiving the Faith of Christ than in conceiving the Flesh of Christ.

Father Suarez says that the most holy Virgin had more Faith than all men and Angels. She saw her Son in the Crib of Bethlehem, and believed Him the Creator of the world. She saw Him fly from Herod, and yet believed Him the King of kings. She saw Him born and believed Him Eternal. She saw Him poor and in need of food, and believed Him the Lord of the universe. She saw Him lying on straw, and believed Him Omnipotent. She observed that He did not speak, and she believed Him Infinite Wisdom. She heard Him weep, and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. In fine, she saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and, although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God.

On these words of the Gospel, *there stood by the cross of Jesus his Mother* (Jo. xix. 25), St. Antoninus says: "Mary stood supported by her Faith which she retained firm in the Divinity of Christ." And for this reason it is, the Saint adds, that in the office of *Tenebrae* only one candle is left lighted. St. Leo, on this subject, applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs, *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night* (Prov. xxxi. 18).

Therefore Mary merited by her great Faith to become "the light of all the faithful," as St. Methodius calls her, and the "Queen of the true Faith," as she is called by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Holy Church herself attributes to the merits of Mary's Faith the destruction of all heresies: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world."

II.

St. Ildephonsus exhorts us to imitate Mary's Faith. But how can we do so? Faith at the same time that it is a *gift*, is also a *virtue*. It is a *gift* of God inasmuch as it is a light infused by Him into our souls; and a *virtue*, inasmuch as the soul has to exercise itself in the practice of it. Hence Faith is not only to be the rule of our belief, but also that of our actions; therefore St. Gregory says "he truly believes who puts what he believes into practice;"

and St. Augustine, "Thou sayest, I believe; do what thou sayest, and that is Faith." To have a lively Faith is to live according to our belief: *My just man liveth by faith* (Heb. x. 38). Thus did the Blessed Virgin live very differently from those who do not live in accordance with what they believe, and whose Faith is dead, as St. James declares, *Faith without works is dead* (James ii. 26).

Diogenes sought for a man on earth; but God, amongst the many faithful, seems to seek for a Christian, for few there are who have good works. The greater number have only the name of Christian. To such as these should be applied the words once addressed by Alexander the Great to a cowardly soldier who was also named Alexander: "Either change thy *name* or change thy *conduct*." But as Blessed John of Avila used to say, "It would be better to shut up these poor creatures as madmen who believe that an eternity of happiness is prepared for those who lead good lives, and an eternity of misery for those who lead bad lives, and yet live as if they believed nothing." St. Augustine therefore exhorts us to see things with the eyes of Christians, that is to say, with eyes which look at all things in the light of Faith; for, as St. Teresa often said, all sins come from a want of Faith. Let us therefore entreat the most holy Virgin, by the merit of her Faith to obtain us a lively Faith. "O Lady, increase our Faith."

Spiritual Reading

PROOFS OF THE TRUTH OF OUR FAITH

Before I proceed farther, I will answer an objection which may be made. It is asserted that the truth of our Faith is clear and evident: but how can it be clear when there are so many Mysteries, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, and the Eucharist, which are obscure and incomprehensible?

I answer, the *Mysteries* of the Faith are obscure, but not the *truth* of the Faith. That our Faith is *true*, is evident by the plainest and most irrefragable arguments. The Mysteries of Faith are obscure to us, and God Himself wishes them to be obscure. First, because He wishes to be honoured by our believing, though we cannot comprehend, all the truths that He has revealed; and, secondly, because we acquire merit by believing what we do not see. What merit should a man have for believing something because he sees and comprehends it? St. Gregory says that Faith

has no merit if human reason furnishes a proof for it. But if we are unable to comprehend the material things of this world -- for who is there that comprehends how the magnet attracts iron? how a single grain of corn, sown in the earth, produces a thousand other grains? Who comprehends the action of the moon, or that of lightning? -- what wonder is there if we cannot comprehend the Mysteries of God?

The *objects*, then, of our Faith are obscure; but the *truth* of our Faith is established by so many evident proofs, that he who does not embrace it can only be called a fool. These proofs are numerous. We shall mention only three of them:

1. The first is taken from the Prophecies written in the Holy Bible so many ages before the event and afterwards exactly fulfilled. Long before it happened, the Death of Our Redeemer was foretold by several Prophets. David, Daniel, Aggeus and Malachy foretold the time and circumstances of His Death. It was foretold that in punishment of the murder of Jesus Christ by the Jews, their temple should be destroyed, and they should be driven from their country; that they should remain blinded in their sin, and should be scattered over the whole earth. We know that all this has taken place. It was also foretold that after the death of the Messias, the world should be converted from idolatry to the worship of the true God -- and this was done by the holy Apostles, who, unaided by learning, nobility, riches, or the protection of the great, and even in spite of the opposition of the potentates of the earth, recalled the world to the worship of the true God and induced men to forsake their gods and their inveterate habits of vice, in order to embrace a Faith that taught them to believe so many Mysteries they could not comprehend, and imposed on them so many Precepts hard to be observed, because so contrary to corrupt nature; such as, to love our enemies, to abstain from pleasures, to bear insults, and to place all our affections, not in the goods that we see, but in the goods of a future life that we do not see.

2. We have further evident proofs of our Faith in the multitude of miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, by the Apostles and other Saints, in the presence of the very enemies of the Faith, who, when they could not deny the prodigies, said that they were

performed by diabolical agency. But true miracles that surpass the power of nature, such as the raising of the dead to life, giving sight to the blind, and the like, cannot be wrought by devils. They have no power to work such miracles. God cannot permit a miracle except in confirmation of the true Faith. Should He permit a miracle in confirmation of error, He Himself would deceive us. Therefore, the true miracles that we witness in the Catholic Church are infallible proofs of the Truth of our Faith.

3. The constancy of the Martyrs is again a very strong argument in favour of our Faith. In the first ages of the Church, in the reign of the tyrants, there were many millions of persons, and among them many tender virgins and children, who, rather than deny the Faith of Jesus Christ, endured, with joy torments and death. Sulpitius Severus writes that, in the time of Diocletian the Martyrs presented themselves to their judges with a desire of Martyrdom that surpassed the avidity with which men pursue the riches and honours of the world.

The Martyrdom of St. Mauritius, and the whole Theban Legion, is one famous in history. The Emperor Maximian commanded all his soldiers to assist at an impious sacrifice he was going to offer to his false deities. St. Mauritius and his soldiers, because they were all Christians, refused to obey the order of the Emperor. Having heard of their refusal, Maximian, to punish their disobedience, ordered them to be decimated -- that is, the head of every tenth man in the legion to be cut off. Each of them desired to die; and the soldiers who were spared envied the happiness of those who were put to death for Jesus Christ. As soon as this was made known to Maximian, he ordered them to be decimated a second time; but this only increased their desire of Martyrdom. In the end the tyrant ordered them all to be beheaded; and all with joy in their faces, laid down their arms, and, like so many meek lambs, gladly and without resistance submitted to death.

Prudentius relates that a child seven years old, whose name is unrecorded, was tempted by Asclepiades to deny the Faith of Christ; but when the boy refused, saying that he had been taught this Faith by his mother, the tyrant sent for her, and in her presence caused the child to be scourged till his whole body became

one wound. All the spectators shed tears of pity; but the mother exulted with joy at the sight of the fortitude of her son. Before death, the child being thirsty, asked his mother for a little water. "Son," said the mother, "have patience a little while; you shall soon be satiated in Heaven with every delight." The prefect, enraged at the constancy of the mother and the son, commanded his head to be cut off instantly. After the execution of the order, the mother took the dead child in her arms, and kissed him with feelings of the most joyful triumph because he had laid down his life for Jesus Christ.

From all that we have said, we ought to gather that we are bound to return God the most heartfelt thanks for having given us the gift of the true Faith. How great is the number of infidels, heretics, and schismatics! Catholics do not amount to a tenth of the human race, and God has placed us in this number. By His Providence we are born in the bosom of the true Church. Few thank God for this great benefit. Let us, at least, be careful to thank Him for it every day.

Evening Meditation

THE PATIENCE OF GOD WITH SINNERS

I.

The more we have experienced the patient mercies of God, the more we ought to be afraid of continuing to abuse them, lest the hour of God's vengeance overtake us. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay in due time* (Deut. xxxii. 35). God's forbearance will cease towards those who cease not to abuse it.

I give Thee thanks, O Lord, for having patiently borne with me though I have so often betrayed Thee. Make me sensible of the evil that I have done in abusing Thy patience for so long a time. Make me sorry for all the offences I have committed against Thee. No, I will never more abuse Thy tender mercy.

"Commit this sin; you can afterwards confess it." Such is the artifice with which the devil has drawn many souls into hell. Many Christians now in hell have been lost by this delusion. *The Lord waiteth that he may have mercy on you* (Is. xxx. 18). God waits for the sinner that the sinner may be converted and obtain mercy; but when God sees that the time which He allows the sinner for doing penance is employed only to increase the number of

his offences, then He waits no longer but punishes him as he deserves.

Pardon me, O God, for I desire never more to offend Thee. And why should I delay? That Thou mayest condemn me to hell? I fear, indeed, that now Thou canst no longer have patience with me. I have, indeed, offended Thee too grievously. I am sorry for it. I repent of it. I hope for forgiveness through the merits of the Blood Thou hast shed for me.

II.

The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because his compassions have not failed (Lam. iii. 22). Thus should he exclaim who finds to his confusion, that he has frequently offended God. He should be most grateful to God for not having suffered him to die in his sins, and be most careful not to offend Him again; otherwise the Lord will reproach him, saying: *What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?* (Is. v. 4). God will say to him: Ungrateful soul, if thou hadst committed the same offences against man, who is viler than the earth, verily he would not have borne with thee. And what great mercies have I not exercised towards thee! How many times have I not called thee, and enlightened thee, and pardoned thee? The time of punishment is at hand! The time of forgiveness is past! -- Thus has God spoken to many who are now suffering in hell, where one of their greatest torments is the remembrance of the mercies they formerly received from God.

Jesus, my Redeemer and my Judge, I also have deserved to hear the same from Thy mouth; but I hear Thee now calling me again to pardon: *Be converted to the Lord thy God* (Osee xiv. 2). O accursed sin which has made me lose my God, how much do I abhor and detest thee! I turn my whole soul towards Thee, my Lord and my God. My sovereign Good, I love Thee, and because I love Thee I repent with my whole soul for having during the time past, so much despised Thee. My God, I desire never more to offend Thee: give me Thy love, grant me perseverance. Mary, my refuge, succour and help me.

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE TENDER COMPASSION OF MARY, AND HER READINESS TO ASSIST US IN ALL OUR WANTS

They have no wine. (Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii. 1-11).

Mary showed, even when living in this world, the great compassion she would afterwards exercise towards us in our necessities. Without being asked, and listening only to the dictates of her compassionate heart, she lays before her Son the distress of the bride and bridegroom. *They have no wine.* If Mary unasked is so prompt to succour the needy, how much more so is she to succour those who invoke her aid and ask for her help?

I.

The tenderness of Mary's Mercy may be inferred from the fact related in today's Gospel. The wine fails, the spouses are troubled, no one speaks to Mary to ask her Son to console them in their necessity. But the tenderness of Mary's heart which, according to St. Bernardine of Sienna, cannot but pity the afflicted, moved her to take the office of advocate, and without being asked, to entreat her Son to work a miracle. "Unasked, she assumed the office of an advocate and a compassionate helper." Hence, adds the same Saint, if, unasked, this good Lady has done so much, what will she not do for those who invoke her intercession?

From what is related in the Gospel St. Bonaventure draws another argument to show the great graces we may hope to obtain through Mary now that she reigns in Heaven. If she was so compassionate on earth, how much greater must be her mercy now that she is in Paradise? Great was the mercy of Mary while in exile on earth, but it is much greater now that she is a Queen in Heaven, because she now sees the misery of men. Mary in Heaven enjoys the vision of God, and therefore she sees our wants far more clearly than when she was on earth; hence, as her pity for us is increased, so also is her desire to assist us more ardent. Truly, then, has Richard of St. Victor spoken, addressing the Blessed Virgin: "So tender is thy heart thou canst not see misery without succouring it."

St. Peter Damien says that the Virgin "loves us with an invincible love." How ardently soever the Saints may have loved this amiable Queen, their affection fell far short of the love which Mary bore to them. It is this love that makes her so solicitous for our welfare. The Saints in Heaven, says St. Augustine, have great power to obtain grace from God for those who recommend themselves to their prayers; but as Mary is of all the Saints the most powerful, she is of all the most desirous to procure for us the divine Mercy.

O Mary, behold at thy feet a miserable slave of hell, who implores thy Mercy. I, indeed, deserve no favour, but thou art the Mother of Mercy, and Mercy is exercised in favour of those who are unworthy. The whole world calls thee the refuge and the hope of sinners; thou art, then, my refuge and my hope. I am a lost sheep, but it was to save the lost sheep the Eternal Word came down from Heaven and became thy Son. He wishes me to have recourse to thee and that thou assist me by thy prayers.

II.

Our great advocate Mary once said to St. Bridget, she regards not the iniquities of the sinner who has recourse to her, but the disposition with which he invokes her aid. If he comes to her with a firm purpose of amendment she receives him, and by her intercession heals his wounds, and brings him to salvation. "However great a man's sins may be, if he return to me, I am ready instantly to receive him. Nor do I regard the number or the enormity of his sins, but the will with which he comes to me; for I do not disdain to anoint and heal his wounds, because I am called, and truly am, the Mother of Mercy." *The Lord keeps His eyes upon the just* (Ps. xxxiii. 16). But the Blessed Virgin keeps them upon the just and sinners, and acts towards each one of them precisely like a mother who has her eyes always fixed upon her child either to prevent it from falling or to raise it when fallen.

The Blessed Virgin is called *a fair olive tree in the plains* (Eccclus. xxiv. 19). From the olive, oil only comes forth; and from the hands of Mary only graces and mercies flow. According to Cardinal Hugo, it is said that she remains in the plains to show that she is ready to assist all those who have recourse to her.

St. Bonaventure used to say that in turning to Mary, he saw Mercy itself receiving him. "When I behold thee, O my Lady, I see nothing but Mercy." The Virgin said one day to St. Bridget that miserable, and miserable for eternity, shall be the sinner who, though he has it in his power during life to come to her who is able and willing to assist him, neglects to invoke her aid, and is lost. *The devil*, says St. Peter, *as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour* (1 Pet. v. 8). But this Mother of Mercy constantly goeth about in search of sinners to save them. This Queen of clemency presents our petitions, and begins to assist us before we ask the assistance of her prayers. Because Mary's heart is so full of tenderness towards us that she cannot behold our miseries without affording relief.

Let us, then, in all our wants, be most careful to have recourse to this Mother of Mercy who is always ready to assist those who invoke her aid. She is always prepared to come to our help and frequently anticipates our supplications; but ordinarily, she requires that we should pray to her, and is offended when we neglect to ask her assistance. Thou, O Blessed Lady, art displeased not only with those who commit an injury against thee, but also with those who do not ask favours of thee, says St. Bonaventure. Hence, as the same holy Doctor teaches, it is not possible that Mary should neglect to succour a soul that flies to her for protection; for she cannot but pity and console the afflicted who have recourse to her.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners! O great Mother of God, thou prayest for all; pray to thy Son also for me. Tell Him that I am thy client and that thou art my protectress. Tell Him that in thee after Him I have placed all my hope. Tell Him to pardon me, that I repent of all the insults I have offered Him. Tell Him to grant me in His mercy holy perseverance. Tell Him to grant me the grace to love Him with my whole heart. In fine, tell Him to save me. He does whatsoever thou askest. O Mary, my hope, I trust in thee. Have pity upon me.

Spiritual Reading

THE GREATNESS OF MARY'S POWER TO OBTAIN FOR US FROM GOD ALL THE GRACES OF WHICH WE STAND IN NEED.

And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine (Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii. 1-11).

In today's Gospel we read that Jesus Christ having been invited, went with His holy Mother to a marriage at Cana of Galilee. *The wine failing*, Mary said to her divine Son: *They have no wine*. By these words she intended to ask her Son to console the spouses, who were afflicted because the wine had failed. Jesus answered: *Woman, what is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come*. He meant that the time destined for the performance of miracles was that of His preaching through Judea. But, though His answer appeared to be a refusal of the request of Mary, the Son, says St. John Chrysostom, resolved to yield to the desire of the mother. "Although He said, *My hour is not yet come*, He granted the petition of His Mother." Mary said to the waiters: *Whatever he shall say to you do ye*. Jesus bade them fill the water-pots with water and the water was changed into most excellent wine. Thus the bridegroom and the entire family were filled with gladness.

From the fact related in this day's Gospel, let us consider *the greatness of Mary's power to obtain for us from God all the graces of which we are in need*.

So great is Mary's merit in the eyes of God, that, according to St. Bonaventure, her prayers are infallibly heard. "The merit of Mary is so great before God, that her petition cannot be rejected." But why are the prayers of Mary so powerful in the sight of God? It is, says St. Antoninus, because "the petition of the Mother of God partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible that she should not be heard." The prayers of the Saints are the prayers of *servants*; but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of *a mother*, and therefore, according to the holy Doctor, they are, in a certain sense, regarded as commands by her Son Who loves her so tenderly. It is, then, impossible that the prayers of Mary should be rejected.

Hence, according to Cosmas of Jerusalem, the intercession of Mary is all-powerful -- *Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O Maria!* It is right, as Richard of St. Laurence teaches, that the Son should impart His power to the Mother. Jesus Christ, Who is All-powerful, has made Mary omnipotent, as far as a creature is capable of omnipotence; that is, omnipotent in obtaining from Him, her

divine Son, whatever she asks. Hence St. Bernardine of Sienna was able to say that all are subject to the power of Mary, and God Himself obeys her.

St. Bridget heard our Saviour one day addressing the Blessed Virgin in the following words: "Ask from Me whatever you wish, for your petition cannot be fruitless." My Mother, ask of Me what you please; I cannot reject any prayer which you present to Me; "because since you refused Me nothing on earth, I will refuse you nothing in Heaven."

St. George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says that Jesus Christ hears all the prayers of His Mother, as if He wished thereby to discharge the obligation which He owes to her for having given to Him His human nature, by consenting to accept Him for her Son. Hence, St. Methodius, Martyr, used to say to Mary: "Rejoice, rejoice, O holy Virgin; for thou hast for thy debtor that Son to Whom we are all debtors; to thee He owes the human nature which He received from thee."

St. Gregory of Nicomedia encourages sinners by the assurance that, if they have recourse to the Virgin Mary with a determination to amend their lives, she will save them by her intercession. Hence, turning to Mary, he exclaimed: "Thou hast insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome thy clemency." O Mother of God, the sins of a Christian, however great they may be, cannot overcome thy mercy. "Nothing," adds the same Saint, "resists thy power, for the Creator regards thy glory as His own." Nothing is impossible to thee, says St. Peter Damian, thou canst raise even those who are in despair to hopes of salvation.

Richard of St. Laurence remarks that, in announcing to the Blessed Virgin that God had chosen her for the mother of His Son, the Archangel Gabriel said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God* (Luke i. 30). From which words the same author concludes: "If we wish to recover lost grace, let us seek Mary by whom this grace has been found." She never lost divine grace; she always possessed it. If the angel declared that she had *found grace*, he meant that she had found it not for herself, but for us miserable sinners, who had lost it. Hence Cardinal Hugo exhorts us to go to Mary, and say to her: O Blessed Lady,

property should be restored to those who lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine -- for thou hast never lost the grace of God -- but ours: we have lost it through our own fault; to us, then, thou oughtest to restore it. "Sinners, who by your sins have forfeited the divine grace, run to the Virgin and say to her with confidence: Restore us to our property which thou hast found."

It was revealed to St. Gertrude, that all the graces which we ask of God through the intercession of Mary, will be given to us. She heard Jesus saying to His Divine Mother: "Through thee all who ask mercy with a purpose of amending their lives, shall obtain grace." If all Paradise asked a favour of God, and Mary asked the opposite grace, the Lord would hear Mary, and would reject the petition of the rest of the celestial host. "Because," says Father Suarez, "God loves the Virgin alone more than all the other Saints."

Let us, then, conclude in the words of St. Bernard: "Let us seek grace and let us seek it through Mary, for her petition cannot be rejected." Let us seek through Mary all the graces that we desire to receive from God, and we shall obtain them; for she is a Mother, and her Son cannot refuse to hear her prayers or to grant the graces which she asks from Him.

But, to obtain special favours from this good Lady, we must perform in her honour certain devotions practised by her servants, as follows:

1. To recite every day at least five Decades of the *Rosary*.
2. To fast every Saturday in her honour. Many persons fast every Saturday on bread and water; you should fast in this manner at least on the Vigils of her seven principal Festivals.
3. To say the *Angelus*, morning, noon and evening, and to salute her frequently during the day with an *Ave Maria*, a *Hail Mary*, particularly when you hear the clock strike, or when you see her image, and also when you leave or return to your house.
4. To say every evening the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin* before you go to rest; and for this purpose procure an image of Mary and keep it near your bed.
5. To wear the Scapulars of our Lady of Dolours, and of Mount Carmel.
6. There are many other devotions practised by the servants

of Mary; but the most useful of all is, to recommend yourself frequently to her prayers. Never omit to say three *Hail Marys* in the morning, to beg of her to preserve you from sin during the day. In all temptations have immediate recourse to her. To resist every temptation, it is sufficient to pronounce the Names, *Jesus and Mary!* And if the temptation continues, let us continue to invoke Jesus and Mary, and the devil shall never be able to conquer us.

St. Bonaventure calls Mary the salvation of those who invoke her. And if a true servant of Mary were lost (I mean one truly devoted to her, who wishes to amend his life, and invoke with confidence this advocate of sinners), this would happen either because Mary was unable or unwilling to assist him. But, says St. Bernard, this is impossible: being the Mother of Omnipotence and of Mercy, Mary cannot want *the power*, or *the will*, to save her servants. Justly, then, is she called the salvation of all who invoke her aid. Of this truth there are numberless examples: that of St. Mary of Egypt will be sufficient. After leading for many years a sinful and dissolute life, she wished to enter the church of Jerusalem in which the Festival of the Holy Cross was being celebrated. To make her feel her miseries, God closed against her the door that was open to all others. As often as she endeavoured to enter, an invisible force drove her back. She instantly perceived her miserable condition, and remained in sorrow outside the church. Fortunately for her there was an image of most holy Mary over the porch of the church. As a poor sinner she recommended herself to the Divine Mother and promised to change her life. After her prayer she felt encouraged to go into the church; and behold, the door which was before closed against her she now finds open! She enters and confesses her sins. She leaves the church, and under the influence of divine inspiration, goes into the desert where she lived for forty-seven years and became a Saint.

Evening Meditation

"PATIENT IN TRIBULATION"

I.

And patience hath a perfect work. It is by patience that we gain Heaven. This earth is a place where we can gain merit; therefore it is not a place of rest, but of labours and sufferings; and it is for this end that God leaves us here that by patience we

may obtain the glory of Paradise. Every one has to suffer in this world, but he who suffers with patience suffers less and saves his soul, while he who suffers with impatience suffers more and is lost. Our Lord does not send us crosses that we may be lost, as some impatient people say, but that thereby we may be saved and acquire more glory in Heaven. Sorrows, contradictions, and all other tribulations, when accepted with patience, become the brightest jewels in our heavenly crown. Whenever, then, we are in affliction, let us console ourselves and thank God for it, since it is a sign that God wishes us to be saved, by chastising us in this life, where the chastisements are but slight and short, so as not to punish us in the next, where the chastisements are terrible and eternal. Woe to the sinner who is prosperous in this life! It is a sign that God has reserved for him eternal punishment.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: "All sufferings, however great, become sweet when we look at Jesus on the Cross." And St. Joseph Calasanctius: "He who cannot suffer for Jesus Christ, does not know how to gain Jesus Christ." He, then, who loves Jesus Christ bears patiently all external crosses -- sickness, pains, dishonour, loss of parents and friends; and all interior crosses -- afflictions, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit, and bears them all in peace. On the other hand, he who is impatient and angry when in tribulation, only increases his suffering, and adds to his punishments in the next life.

O my Jesus, I deserve chastisement. I do not refuse it. I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, I love Thee my God, and because I love Thee I wish to do whatever Thou wilt. O Will of God, Thou art my love! O Blood of my God, Thou art my hope!

II.

St. Teresa says: "the Cross is felt by those who drag it after them by force, but he who embraces it with a good will does not feel it." Hence St. Philip Neri also said that in this world there is no *Purgatory*. It is either *Heaven* or *hell*. He who bears tribulation with patience is in Heaven, but he who does not is in hell. But you will say: "What evil have I done that I should be thus persecuted? Why have I had to suffer such an affront?" O

Christian, go and speak thus to Jesus Christ on the Cross and He will answer: "And I, what have I done, that I should have to suffer such sorrow and ignominy, and this death of the Cross?" If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered so much for the love of you, it is not much that you should suffer this little for the love of Jesus Christ. Particularly if you have ever during your life committed some grievous sin, think that you deserve to be in hell, where you would have to suffer much greater contempt and persecution from the devils. If also you should be persecuted for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake* (Matt. v. 10). Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united with Jesus Christ in this world must be persecuted.

O Jesus, I will always say in whatever shall befall me, *Thy will be done!* My God, thus hast Thou willed, thus I will. My God, I wish only what Thou wishest and may Thy will be always accomplished in me. My Jesus, through Thy merits, grant me the grace always to repeat the beautiful dictate of love -- *Thy will be done! Thy will be done!*

Monday--Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE HOUR OF DEATH

Be you, then, also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come (Luke xii. 40).

All know that they must die, but the misfortune is that many consider death at such a distance away that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit and the most sickly flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*

I.

It is certain that we shall die, but the hour of death is uncertain. "Nothing," says the author who styles himself *Idiota*, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death." God has already fixed the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment, when I and you are to leave this earth and go into eternity; but the time is unknown to us. To

exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death will come unawares, and like a thief in the night. *The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night* (1 Thess. v. 2). He tells us to be, then, always vigilant; because, when we least expect Him, He will come to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come*. St. Gregory says that for our good, God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die. "Since, then," says St. Bernard, "death may take away life at any time and in any place, we ought, if we wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death."

All know that they must die: but the misfortune is, that many consider death such a distance off, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly -- some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so suddenly, and on the day he died. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

Lord, the place in which I ought to be at this moment is not that in which I find myself, but hell, which I have so often merited by my sins! "*Infernus domus mea est*" -- Hell is my house! St. Peter says: *The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance* (2 Peter iii. 9). Then Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me, because Thou didst wish me not to be lost, but return to Thee by repentance. My God, I return to Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet, and supplicate for mercy. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy*. Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended Thee, after I had been favoured with special light. Other sinners also have offended Thee, but they have not received the light Thou gavest me. But in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, Thou commandest me to repent of my sins, and to hope for pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of Thy

Passion.

II.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin by saying, -- Tomorrow you can go to confession -- let your answer be, -- How do I know but this will be the last day of my life? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I should have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity? To how many poor sinners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin they were struck dead and sent to hell? *As fishes are taken with the hook*, says Ecclesiastes, *so men are taken in the evil time* (Eccles. ix. 12). The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune will not happen to you; but you should answer him: If it should happen to me, what would become of me for all eternity?

O my Jesus, though innocent, Thou hast wished to die like a criminal on the Cross, and to shed all Thy Blood to wash away my sins. *O Sanguis Innocentis, lava culpas poenitentis!* O Blood of the Innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent! O Eternal Father, pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear His prayers now that He intercedes for me and makes Himself my Advocate. But it is not enough to receive pardon; I desire also, O God, worthy of infinite love, the grace to love Thee. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I offer Thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous but also venial offences. I will fly from all occasions of sin. *Lead us not into temptation.* For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend Thee. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as Thou pleasest. I accept all infirmities, pains, and losses which Thou mayest be pleased to send me: it is enough for me not to lose Thy grace and Thy love. *Ask and you shall receive* (John xvi. 24). Thou promisest to grant whatever we ask; I ask these two graces -- holy perseverance and the gift of Thy love. O Mary, Mother of Mercy, thou dost pray for me: in thee do I put my trust.

Spiritual Reading

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH

VIRTUES PRACTISED BY THE HOLY MARTYRS

IN THE COMBATS THAT THEY HAD TO SUSTAIN AGAINST THEIR PERSECUTORS

If the reading of the *Lives of the Saints* is a great means of preserving piety, as St. Philip Neri tells us, and as is taught by all the masters of the spiritual life, we shall find it yet more useful to read about the Victories the holy Martyrs gained by sacrificing their lives amid torments. Hence before relating their individual triumphs, we shall find it of great spiritual advantage to consider the principal virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats.

There is no doubt that the Martyrs are indebted for their crown to the power of the grace which they received from Jesus Christ; for He it is that gave them the strength to despise all the promises and the threats of tyrants, and to endure all torments even unto an entire sacrifice of their lives. So that all their merits, as St. Augustine writes, were the effects of the grace that God in His mercy imparted to them. But it is also certain, and even of Faith, that on their part the Martyrs co-operated with the grace which enabled them to win their victory. Innovators have blasphemed against this truth, saying that all the crimes of the wicked and all the good works of the just are the result of necessity; but the same St. Augustine gives them the lie when he says that if such were the case no reward or punishment would be just.

The Martyrs, therefore, acquired great merits, because the virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats were great and heroic. We shall briefly describe these virtues in order that we may imitate them in the midst of all the tribulations to which we may be exposed in this life.

We at first remark that the Martyrs were firmly attached to all the dogmas of the Christian Faith. In the early ages of the Church two false religions specially opposed ours: these were the religion of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. The religion of the Gentiles, by admitting several gods, furnished itself the proof of its falsity; for if the world had been under the dominion of several masters, it could not have maintained that regular and constant order which we see has been preserved for so many centuries up to the present time. This is evident even to the eyes of natural reason; *for every kingdom divided against itself shall be destroyed* (Luke xi. 17). Moreover, the very words of the idolatrous

priests clearly demonstrated the falsity of their worship, since the actions that they attributed to their gods represented the latter as filled with passions and vices. This was how the holy Martyrs reproached the tyrants when the latter exhorted them to sacrifice to their idols: "How can we," they said, "adore your gods, if, instead of offering us models of virtue, they exhibit to us only examples of vice?"

The religion of the Jews, although formerly holy and revealed by God, was at that time not less manifestly obsolete and false. In fact, in the Scriptures themselves which they had received from God and had preserved with so much care and transmitted to us, it was predicted that at a certain time the Son of God was to come upon earth, to be made Man and to die for the salvation of the world; that they themselves would put Him to death on the Cross, as they actually did, and that in punishment of this impiety they would be driven from their own kingdom, and without a king, without a temple, without a country, they would live scattered, and be wanderers throughout the world, abhorred and despised by all nations. These were predictions that were manifestly realized in every particular after the death of the Saviour. What rendered still more certain the truth of our Faith was the formation of a new people of God by the conversion of the Gentiles. This was known to have been announced beforehand in the Scriptures, and this was realized as soon as the Apostles spread throughout the world to promulgate the New Law preached by Jesus Christ. This event was an evident proof of the protection that God gave the Christian Religion; for how could those poor sinners, those publicans or fishermen, such as the Apostles were -- men devoid of learning, of wealth, of every human assistance, and even persecuted by magistrates and emperors, have induced, without Divine assistance, so many Christians to renounce all their property, their honours, and generously to sacrifice their lives amid tortures the most excruciating that the power and the cruelty of the tyrants could invent?

Evening Meditation

THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS IN DEATH

I.

The day of destruction is at hand (Deut. xxxii. 35).

The day of death is called the *Day of Destruction*, because then is destroyed all that man has acquired; honours, friends, riches, possessions, kingdoms -- all are then no more. What, then, doth it profit us to gain the whole world if in death we must leave all? All comes to an end at the bedside of the dying man. Is there any king, think you, -- said St. Ignatius to Xavier when he sought to bring him to God, -- who has taken with him into the other world even a thread of purple to mark his sovereignty? Has any rich man taken with him a single coin, or even one servant to attend him? In death all is left behind. The soul enters eternity alone and unattended, except by its works.

Woe to me! Where are my works to accompany me to a blessed eternity? I can discover none but such as render me deserving of eternal torments!

Men come into the world in unequal conditions: one is born rich, another poor; one a noble, another a plebian; but all go out of it equal and alike. Consider the graves of the dead: see if you can discover among the bodies which are there interred, who was a master and who a servant, who was a king and who a beggar.

O God, while others amass the fortunes of this world, may my only fortune be Thy holy grace. Thou alone art my only Good both in this life and in the next.

II.

In one word, everything on earth will come to an end. All greatness will end, all misery will end, honours will end, ignominies will end, pleasures will end, sufferings will end. Blessed in death, therefore, not he who has abounded in riches, honours and pleasures, but he who has patiently endured poverty, contempt and sufferings! The possession of temporal goods affords no consolation at the moment of death: that alone consoles us which has been done or suffered for God.

O Jesus, detach my heart from this world before death entirely takes me from it. Help me with Thy grace. Thou indeed

knowest how great is my weakness. Permit me not to be any longer unfaithful to Thee, as I have hitherto been. I am sorry, O Lord, for having so often despised Thee. Henceforward I will love Thee above every good, and die a thousand times rather than forfeit Thy grace. But the infernal one ceases not to tempt me. In mercy abandon me not; leave me not to myself; permit me not to be any more separated from Thy love. O Mary, my hope, obtain for me the grace of perseverance.

Tuesday--Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

WE SHOULD SETTLE OUR ACCOUNTS AT ONCE.

The Lord wishes that we be not lost but saved, and therefore by threats of chastisement He unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. He Who wishes you to take care does not wish to destroy.

I.

Except you will be converted, he will brandish his sword (Ps. vii. 13). Behold, God says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend Me, have met with a sudden death, when they least expected it, and were living in peace, secure of a life of many years. For when they shall say: *Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them* (1 Thess. v. 3). Again God says: *Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish* (Luke xiii. 3). Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance? It is because He wishes us to amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. He, says St. Augustine, who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life. It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day of accounting arrives. Dearly beloved Christian, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night, would your accounts be ready? Oh, how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or even another day, to prepare for Judgment? Why then do you not, now that God gives you this time, settle your accounts? Perhaps it may not happen—that this shall be the last day for you? *Delay not to be converted to the Lord and defer it not from day to day; for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee* (Ecclus. v. 8, 9). To save your soul you must give up sin. If, then, you must renounce

it at some time, why do you not abandon it this very moment? Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives? But, for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon but of vengeance. *In the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*

Ah, my dear Redeemer, Thou hast spent all Thy Blood, and hast given Thy life in order to save my soul, and I have often lost it by presuming on Thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused Thy goodness to offend Thee! By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with Thee. Thou didst treat me with mercy, and I offended Thee; Thou didst seek me, and I fled from Thee; Thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done, and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done Thee, and the obligation under which I am to love Thee. Ah, my Jesus, how could I be so dear to Thee Whom I chased away as often as Thou didst seek me. How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given Thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardour of Thy desire to save me from perdition.

II.

Should any one borrow from you a large sum of money, you take care to get legal security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at stake, why do you not say: *Who knows what may happen?* If you lose a sum of money, all is not lost; though in losing it your entire property should be lost, you may still have hopes of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you shall truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself in enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at Thy feet; receive it and bind it on Thy shoulders, that it may never more stray away from Thee. I will never again abandon Thee. I wish to love Thee; I wish to be Thine,

and, provided I belong to Thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me than to live without Thy grace, to be separated from Thee, Who art my God, Who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins, what have you done? You have made me displease my Saviour Who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for Thee. Thou hast died through love for me -- I should die through sorrow for having despised Thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time Thou art pleased to send it. Hitherto I have not loved Thee, or I have loved Thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time that I may love Thee before I die. Change my heart; wound it; inflame it with Thy holy love. Through that affection of charity which made Thee die for me, grant me this favour. I love Thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamoured of Thee. Do not permit me to lose Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Give me Thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my Mother, perform the office of advocate in my behalf. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH - THEIR VIRTUES

It was still more marvellous to behold so many Gentiles embrace a Religion difficult to believe and difficult to practise. It was a Religion difficult to believe, for it taught Mysteries beyond the reach of human reason; for example, the Trinity of One God in Three distinct Persons Who have but one Nature, one Power, and one Will; the Incarnation of the Son of God Who came upon earth to die for the salvation of mankind; and many other Articles regarding Original Sin, the spirituality and the immortality of the soul, the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It was difficult to practise because the Religion of Jesus Christ commanded things contrary to the inclinations of nature corrupted by sin and repugnant to the libertinism in which the pagans were living, accustomed as they were to follow their passions and to give themselves up to the pleasures of the senses. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the Christian Religion was embraced by so many nations! From this universal consent of the nations St. Augustine argues the divinity of our Religion, saying that had not God illuminated by His powerful

grace so many people -- civilized and barbarian, learned and illiterate, noble and plebian, all immersed in the superstitions of their country, imbued from their earliest years with maxims so opposed to the sanctity of Faith -- how could they have embraced it?

Besides the interior lights of grace, there were many other causes that induced the people to embrace Christianity and to remain firm in professing it. Miracles contributed much to inflame their zeal; for from the moment in which the Apostles began to preach, the Lord caused miracles to abound in testimony of the Faith, as St. Mark says: *They preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed* (Mark xvi. 20). It is certain that the great miracles that had been wrought by the Apostles and their disciples contributed largely to the conversion of the world. In vain the adherents of idolatry tried to make men believe these prodigies were the effect of magical incantations: every one well understood that God would never permit them if they were to serve the purpose of giving support to diabolical agency or to a false religion. The proof of miracles was therefore a truly Divine proof by which the Lord confirmed the Christian Religion and the Faith of believers.

The Faith became further strengthened by the constancy of Martyrs of both sexes, of every age and condition; men and women, the aged and the young, the noble and the plebian, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, married and single. They were seen to renounce their homes, their parents, their titles, their fortunes, and everything they possessed, to embrace scourges, racks, fire, torture, and to encounter death under its most horrible aspects; and all this, not only with courage, but with joyfulness and thanksgiving to God, Who made them worthy to suffer and die for His love. St. Justin, who was himself a Martyr, confessed that this heroic virtue of the Christians had been to him a powerful stimulus to embrace the Faith.

The Martyrs received great courage in their sufferings from the desire of quickly arriving at the fruition of the promises made by Jesus Christ to His followers: *Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you ... Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven* (Matt. v. 11). *Every one therefore that shall confess*

me before men I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven (Matt. x. 82).

But what above all filled the Martyrs with courage and ardour and made them wish to die was their great love for their Divine Master Whom St. Augustine calls the King of Martyrs, Who wished to die on the Cross in pain and in desolation for the love of us, as St. Paul says: *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). Actuated by this love, they went with joy to suffer and to die for Jesus Christ; so that, not content with enduring the pains that were inflicted upon them, they besought, they provoked the executioners and the tyrants, to obtain from them an increase of torture, in order that they might show themselves more grateful to God Who died for love of them.

Hence it came to pass, according to St. Justin, that in the course of three Centuries the whole earth was filled with Martyrs and Christians. "There is no nation, Greek or barbarian," writes the holy Martyr to Trypho, "that does not offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Creator of the universe by invoking the Name of Jesus Christ." St. Irenaeus, in like manner, attests that at his time the Faith of Jesus Christ was extended over the entire world. Pliny, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan, declared that the Christian Faith was spread to such a degree that the temples of the gods were abandoned, and that victims were no longer offered to the idols. And Tiberian also wrote to the same Emperor that it would be unwise to put to death all the Christians, since the number of those who were anxious to die for Jesus Christ was incalculable.

Evening Meditation

THE ABUSE OF GOD'S MERCY

I.

There are two ways by which the devil endeavours to deceive men to their eternal ruin. After they have committed sin he tempts them to despair on account of the severity of Divine justice; while before they had sinned he encouraged them to do so by the hope of obtaining the Divine mercy. And he effects the ruin of numberless souls as much by the second as by the first artifice. "God is merciful," says the obstinate sinner to him who would convert him from the iniquity of his ways. "God is

merciful." But as the Mother of God expresses it in her Canticle, *His mercy is to them that fear him* (Luke i. 50). Yes, the Lord deals mercifully with him who fears to offend Him, but not with the man who presumes upon His mercy to offend Him still more.

O God, I give Thee thanks for having made me sensible of Thy patience in bearing with me. Behold, I am of the number of those who, presuming on Thy goodness, have offended Thee again and again!

God is merciful, -- but He is also just! Sinners are desirous that He should be merciful only, without being just; but that is impossible, because were He only to forgive and never to chastise, He would be wanting in justice. Hence Blessed Father Avila observes that patience on the part of God towards those who avail themselves of His compassion to offend Him all the more, would not be mercy but a want of justice. He is bound to chastise the ungrateful. He bears with them for a certain time, but after that abandons them.

Such a punishment, O God, has not as yet overtaken me, or else I had now dwelt in hell, or had been obstinate in my sins. But no: I desire to amend my life; I desire to offend Thee no more. Though I have hitherto displeased Thee, I am sorry for it with my whole soul. I desire henceforth to love Thee, and I desire to love Thee more than others, because Thou hast not shown the same patience towards others as towards me.

II.

God is not mocked (Gal. vi. 7). But He would be mocked if the sinner could go on continually offending Him, and yet afterwards enjoy Him in Heaven. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap* (Gal. vi. 8). He who sows good works shall reap rewards; but he who sows iniquities shall reap chastisements. The hope of those who commit sin because God is forgiving, is an abomination in His sight. *Their hope*, says holy Job, *is an abomination* (Job xi. 20). Hence the sinner, by just such hope, provokes God to chastise him the sooner, as that servant would provoke his master, who, because his master was good, took advantage of his goodness to behave wickedly.

O Jesus, such, I fear, has been my conduct towards Thee. Because Thou wast good I made no account of Thy precepts! I

confess that I have done wickedly, and I detest all the offences I have committed against Thee. Now I love Thee more than myself, and I desire never more to displease Thee. Ah, if I should again offend Thee by mortal sin! Permit it not, O Lord, but rather let me die. O Mary, Mother of perseverance, do thou assist me.

Wednesday--Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"BE YE READY."

The Lord does not tell us *to prepare ourselves for death*, but *to be prepared*, when death arrives. Be ye ready! The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well. To die well and happily we must prepare ourselves beforehand.

I.

Be ye ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to tranquillise a troubled conscience. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then He will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of His graces. *Revenge is mine, I will repay* (Rom. xii. 19). It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he was able, to save his soul, will not be able when he is willing. But you will say: Perhaps I may still be converted and saved. Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, Perhaps I may not be drowned? O God! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason. When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is concerned, they speak like fools.

Who knows, dear Christian, but this point which you read is the last warning that God may send you? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die. St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling. St. Antoninus relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, command-

ed him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread might give way filled him with so much terror that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at any moment fall upon us.

Ah my God! who has ever loved me more than Thou hast? And whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted Thee? O Blood! O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the Wounds of Jesus; behold Thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking Thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator, of having offended Thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou didst create me that I might love Thee; and I have lived as if Thou hadst created me to offend Thee.

II.

It is indeed a question of Eternity. *If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place soever it shall fall there shall it lie* (Eccles. xi. 3). If, when death comes, we are found in the grace of God, oh! with what joy shall we say: I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever. But, if death finds the soul in sin, with what despair will it exclaim: *Ergo erravimus!* I have erred! And for my error there will be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the Blessed Father Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him: Oh! that I had a little more time to prepare for death! This fear made the Abbot Agatha, who spent so many years in penance, say at death: What will become of me? Who can know the judgments of God? St. Arsenius, too, trembled at the hour of death; and being asked by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said: "My children, this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said: *What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?* (Job xxxi. 14).

O Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love Thee. I have hitherto resisted Thy will, but I will resist no longer, and will do whatsoever Thou commandest. Thou commandest me to detest the outrages I have offered Thee; behold, I detest them with my whole heart. Thou

commandest me to resolve to offend Thee no more; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit Thy grace. Thou commandest me to love Thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love Thee, and I wish to love nothing else but Thee. Thou wilt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From Thee I ask, and from Thee I hope for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ grant that I may be always faithful to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, with St. Bonaventure: "My beloved is one, my love is one." I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving Thee displeasure; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against Thee, and in loving Thee. Mary, my Mother, pray for all who recommend themselves to thee, -- pray to Jesus also for me.

Spiritual Reading

"THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS THE SEED OF CHRISTIANS"

From the foregoing facts Clement of Alexandria subsequently inferred, that if God Himself had not upheld the Christian Faith, it could never have withstood the efforts of so many philosophers who endeavoured to obscure it with sophisms, or the violence of so many kings and emperors who laboured to extinguish it by persecution. The number of Christians, far from having been diminished by the slaughter of the Saints, became so wonderfully increased, that Tertullian said: "Our number grows in the same measure that you decimate us; the Blood of the Christians is as it were a seed." He used the word *seed* because the Blood of the Martyrs was that which multiplied the faithful. Tertullian, indeed, boasted of this, and upbraided the tyrants with their impotency; since, notwithstanding all their endeavours to exterminate the followers of the Gospel, the streets, the Forum, and even the Senate, were filled with Christians. Origen likewise wrote: "It is a thing worthy of note and eminently calculated to excite wonder, the steady progress of the Christian Religion, in spite of the most untiring persecution and continual Martyrdoms." "Greeks and barbarians," continues this celebrated writer, "the learned and unlearned, voluntarily embraced it; from which we may conclude that its propagation is due to a higher than human power."

Before the end of the Second Century, we are assured by Tertullian, that all nations (*universae gentes*) had embraced the Faith of Jesus. He makes special mention of the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Armenia, and of Phrygia, of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cirenasia, and Palestine; the Gethuli, the whole of Spain, many of the Gallic tribes, Bretagne, the Sarmatians, the Dacians, the Scythians, and many remote nations, provinces and islands. Arnobius, who died a hundred years after Tertullian, adds to the list of those converted to the Faith, the Indians, the Sarii, the Persians, and the Medes; Arabia, Syria, Gallacia, Acaja, Macedonia, and Epirus, with all the islands and provinces from the rising to the setting sun. Besides those regions enumerated by Tertullian, St. Athanasius, half a century afterwards, mentions others. Writing to the Emperor Jovinian, he says: "Know that this Faith has been preached from the beginning, approved by the Nicene Fathers, and professed by all the Churches of the world -- in Spain, in England, and in Gaul; throughout the whole of Italy, in Dalmatia, Dacia, Mysia, and Macedonia; in all Greece, and in all Africa; in Sardinia, Cyprus, Crete, Pamphylia, Lysia, and Isauria; in Egypt and Lybia, in Pontus and Cappadocia."

Thus we see that, after the Ten Persecutions of the Roman emperors, which lasted for more than two hundred years, beginning from the first under Nero, the greater part of the human race, having abandoned the worship of false deities, had embraced the doctrines of Christianity. Finally, after so many struggles, it pleased the Almighty Disposer of events to grant peace to His Church under Constantine. This emperor was, after a miraculous manner, chosen by Heaven for the carrying out of the merciful dispensations of Divine Providence. Having first overcome Maxentius and afterwards Licinius, in the strong arm of the Lord, -- for, as Eusebius relates, in whatever direction the *Labarum*, or Standard of the Cross, appeared, the enemy either fled or surrendered, -- after peace had been established he forbade the Gentiles to sacrifice any longer to their idols, and caused magnificent temples to be erected to the honour of Jesus Christ. And oh, how glorious did not the Church then

appear! Still more widely extending her blessed influence, and, with every new conquest, bringing additional joy to the hearts of her once persecuted children! Then ceased the torments of the Martyr, and with them the bitter calumnies of the idolater. Busy multitudes of zealous converts were to be seen in every city destroying the idols they once adored, pulling down the ancient shrines of superstition, and erecting new Altars to the worship of the true God! The confines of so vast an empire were too narrow a limit for the active zeal of the great Constantine. He laboured to propagate the saving doctrines of Religion in Persia and among the barbarous nations he had subdued; nor would he, according to Eusebius and Socrates, grant them the friendship of the Roman Empire except upon the condition of their becoming Christians.

Evening Meditation

THE EMPTINESS AND SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

I.

Holy David said that the happiness of this life is as the dream of one awaking from sleep: *As the dream of them that awake* (Ps. lxxii. 20). All the greatness and glory of this world will appear no more to poor worldlings at the hour of death than a dream to one awaking from sleep, who finds that the fortune he had acquired in his dreams ends with his sleep. Hence did one who was undeceived wisely write on the skull of a dead man: *Cogitanti omnia vilesunt: To one who thinks, all things are worthless.* Yes, to him who thinks on death, all the goods of this life appear, as they really are, vile and transitory. Nor can that man fix his affections on the earth who reflects that in a short time he must leave it forever. Ah, my God, how often have I despised Thy grace for the miserable goods of this world! From henceforth I desire to think of nothing but of loving and serving Thee. Assist me with Thy Holy grace.

And is it thus then, that worldly grandeur and sovereign power must end! Such was the exclamation of St. Francis Borgia, when he beheld the corpse of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the flower of her youth. Reflecting upon what he saw, he resolved to bid adieu to the world, and to give himself entirely to God, saying: I will henceforward serve a master who will never forsake

me. Let us detach ourselves from the goods of the present life before death tears us away from them. What folly it is to expose ourselves to the danger of losing our souls, for the sake of some attachment to this miserable world, from which we shall soon have to depart, for soon it will be said to us by the minister of God: *Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world!* O my Jesus that I had always loved Thee! How many offences have I been guilty of against Thee! Teach me how to correct my disorderly life, for I am willing to do whatever Thou pleasest. Accept of my love, accept of my repentance, in which I love Thee more than myself, and crave Thy mercy and compassion.

II.

Reflect that you cannot remain for ever in this world. You must one day leave the country in which you now reside; you must one day go out from the house in which you now dwell, to return to it no more. Think that many before you inhabited the same room in which you are at present reading; that they slept in the same bed in which you are accustomed to sleep: and where are they now? Gone into eternity. The same will happen to you. Make me to understand, O God, the injustice I have been guilty of in turning my back upon Thee, my Sovereign Good; and grant me sorrow to bewail my ingratitude as I ought. O that I had died rather than ever offend Thee. Suffer me not to live any longer ungrateful for the love Thou hast shown me. My dear Redeemer, I love Thee above all things and I desire to love Thee with all my strength during the remainder of my life. Strengthen my weakness by Thy grace. And do thou, O Mary, Mother of God, intercede for me. Amen.

Thursday--Second Week after Epiphany **Morning Meditation**

(For Twenty-Fifth of January)

THE LIFE OF SORROW JESUS LED EVEN FROM HIS BIRTH

The Prophet Isaias calls Jesus Christ *the man of sorrows*, because His life was to be full of sorrow. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death. It commenced with His life -- a life of internal and external sorrows from beginning to end.

I.

Jesus Christ could have saved man without suffering and without dying; but no, He chose a life full of tribulations in order to make us know how much He loved us. Therefore the Prophet Isaias called Him *the Man of sorrows* (Is. liii. 3), because the life of Jesus Christ was to be a life full of sorrows. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death, but from the commencement of His life.

Behold Him, as soon as He is born, laid in a stable where for Jesus everything is a torment. His sight is tormented by seeing nothing in the cave but black, rough walls. His sense of smell is tormented by the stench of the dung of beasts lying there. His sense of touch is tormented by the pricking of the straw that serves Him as a bed. Soon after His birth He is obliged to fly into Egypt where He passed several years of His childhood poor and despised. The life which He afterwards led in Nazareth was not less poor and lowly. Behold Him at length terminating His life in Jerusalem, dying on a Cross by dint of torments.

O my sweet Love, have I, then, by my sins kept Thee in a state of affliction all Thy life long? Oh, tell me, then, what I can do that Thou mayest forgive me, for I will leave nothing undone. I repent, O sovereign Good, of all the offences I have committed against Thee; I repent, and I love Thee more than myself. I feel a great desire to love Thee. It is Thou that givest me this desire; give me, therefore, strength to love Thee ardently.

II.

Thus, then, the life of Jesus was one of continual suffering, and, indeed, a double suffering; for He had constantly before His eyes all the sorrows that would afflict Him until the day of His death. Sister Mary Magdalen Orsini, complaining one day before the Crucifix, said to Him: "O Lord, Thou wert on the Cross only for three hours, but I have suffered this pain for several years." Jesus answered her: "Oh, ignorant that thou art, what dost thou say? I suffered even from My Mother's womb all the pains of My life and My death." But all these sufferings did not so much afflict Jesus Christ -- because He chose voluntarily to suffer them -- as did the sight of our sins, and of our ingratitude for His great love. St. Margaret of Cortona was never satisfied

with weeping over the offences she committed against God. Wherefore her confessor said to her one day: "Margaret, cease crying, because God has already forgiven thee." But she replied: "Ah, Father, how can I cease weeping, when I know that my sins kept Jesus Christ in a state of affliction all His life?"

It is only just, O Jesus, that I, who have offended Thee so much, should also love Thee much. Oh, remind me constantly of the love Thou hast borne me, in order that my soul may always burn with the love of Thee; that it may think of Thee alone, desire Thee alone, and strive to please Thee alone. O God of love, I, who once was the slave of hell, now give myself entirely to Thee. Accept me in Thy mercy, O Jesus, and bind me with Thy love, from this day forth. I will love Thee in life, and loving Thee I will die. O Mary, my Mother and my hope, help me to love Thy dear Jesus and mine. This favour alone I desire and hope from thee.

Spiritual Reading

"THE HAND OF THE LORD IS NOT SHORTENED."

True it is that from time to time divers heresies have sprung up in the Church, which have been productive of much evil; *but the hand of the Lord hath not been shortened.* Even in these latter days we have had authentic accounts of very considerable advances made by the Church, both among heretics and pagans. A learned author writes that ten thousand Arians have recently been converted in Transylvania. In Prussia a very large number of Catholic churches have been erected. In Denmark the public profession of the Catholic Religion is now tolerated. The missions in England are being carried on with very happy results. We have been assured by persons of authority and undoubted veracity, that in the East forty thousand Armenian and other oriental heretics have been received into the communion of our holy Church; that in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Chaldea the number of Catholics is every day increasing; and that during the last few years several Nestorian Bishops have abjured the errors of that sect. Finally, during the present Century a considerable number of pagans have been converted in India and China.

But to return to the Martyrs. The number of Christians who had received the Crown of Martyrdom previous to the accession

of Constantine was almost incredible. Many authors calculate the number of those who had laid down their lives for the Faith to have been nearly eleven millions! So that if this number were equally distributed in the course of one year, thirty thousand would be allotted to each day.

Oh, the beautiful harvest of holy Martyrs that Paradise has reaped since the preaching of the Gospel! But, O God, what will be the confusion of the tyrants and of all the persecutors of the Faith on the day of General Judgment, at the sight of the Martyrs once so despised and so maltreated by them, when these celestial heroes shall appear in glory, extolling the greatness of God, and armed with the sword of divine justice to avenge themselves for all the injuries and cruelties exercised against them, as was foretold by David: *The high praises of God in their mouths, and two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance upon the nations; to bind their kings in fetters, and their nobles in manacles of iron* (Ps. cxlix. 6). Then shall the Martyrs judge the Neros, the Domitians, and other persecutors, and shall condemn them; yea, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, *even to the exterior darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matt. xxii. 13).

But it will be for us a subject of more profitable meditation to reflect upon another scene which the great day of general and irrevocable doom will present -- the despair of so many Christians who, having died in mortal sin, will behold with unavailing anguish the triumph of so many Martyrs, who, rather than lose God, suffered themselves to be despoiled of all things, and underwent the most horrid torments that hell could suggest or tyrants inflict; while they, rather than yield a point of honour or forego a momentary gratification, despised the suggestions of divine grace and lost their souls forever!

Evening Meditation

THE CONTEMPT WITH WHICH THE SINNER TREATS GOD

I.

God Himself declares that the sinner treats Him with contempt and complains of it in these words: *I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised me* (Is. i. 2). I have brought up My children, I have preserved and nourished them,

but with base ingratitude they have despised Me. But who is God Who is thus despised by men? He is the Creator of Heaven and earth; He is the sovereign, infinite Good, in Whose sight men and Angels are as a drop of water, or a grain of sand: *as a drop of a bucket ... as a little dust* (Is. xl. 15). In a word, all things created, in the presence of His infinite greatness, are as though they were not: *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him nothing and vanity* (Is. xl. 17).

Behold me, O God, a daring sinner who has presumed to despise Thy infinite majesty. But whilst Thou art infinite majesty, Thou art also infinite mercy. I love Thee, O Lord, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee; do Thou have pity on me.

And, O God, who am I who have despised Thee? A poor helpless worm who have nothing but what Thou in Thy bounty hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast given me my soul, my body, the use of reason, and numberless other benefits in this world; and I have made no other use of them all but to offend Thee, my Benefactor. Nay, more; at the very time that Thou didst preserve my life, that I might not fall into hell as I deserved, I abused Thy goodness and forbearance. O my Saviour, how couldst Thou have had such patience with me? Wretch that I am, how many nights have I slept under Thy displeasure! But Thou wouldst not have me perish. I trust, O my Jesus, in Thy Blessed Passion that Thou wilt enable me to change my life. Let not that sacred Blood be lost, which with so much pain and sorrow Thou didst shed for my salvation.

II.

Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing; he is so blind that he knows nothing; so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! Vile dust, says St. Bernard, dares to provoke such tremendous Majesty!

O God, what have I done? Thou, my Redeemer, hast shown such regard for my soul as to shed Thy Blood for its salvation, and I have been so wretched as to allow it to perish for a mere nothing, for a caprice, for a maddening passion, for a miserable gratification, in contempt of Thy grace and love. Ah! if Faith

did not assure me that Thou didst promise to pardon those who repent, I should not now dare to implore Thy forgiveness. O my Saviour, I kiss Thy sacred Wounds, and for the love of these Wounds I beseech Thee to forget the injuries I have committed against Thee. Thou hast said that when the sinner repents, Thou wilt forget all his ingratitude. I am sorry above every evil for having despised Thee, my sovereign Good; make haste to pardon me, as Thou hast promised; let me be quickly reconciled to Thee. I love Thee now more than myself; may I never more incur Thy displeasure! O Mary, refuge of sinners, succour a poor sinner who invokes thy assistance.

Friday--Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

ANGUISH OF THE DYING SINNER

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. Devils will tempt him, and his sins like so many satellites will say to him: *We are thy works; we shall not desert thee.*

I.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand the devils will torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdition of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain it, and that if they lose it at death, they lose it forever. *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time* (Apoc. xii. 12). The dying man will be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils who will labour for his damnation. *Their houses shall be filled with serpents* (Is. xiii. 21). One tempter will say: Fear not; you will recover. Another: You have been deaf to the inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that He will have mercy on you? Another will ask: How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbours? Another: Do you not see that your Confessions have been useless; that they have been made without sorrow or purpose of amendment? How will you be able to repair them now?

On the other hand, the dying man will see himself surrounded by his sins. *Evils*, says David, *shall catch the unjust man unto destruction* (Ps. cxxxix. 12). These sins, says St. Bernard, shall, like so many satellites, keep him in chains, saying unto him: We are your works; we shall not desert you. We are your fruits, and we will not leave you; we will accompany you into the other world and will present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge. The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them and return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened and his heart hardened. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it* (Ecclus. iii. 27). St. Bernard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he will end his life in the same unhappy state.

My dear Saviour, assist me; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin; my passions attack me violently; my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at Thy feet; have pity on me and deliver me from so many evils. *In thee, O Lord, I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever* (Ps. xxx. 6). Do not suffer a soul that trusts in Thee to be lost. *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee* (Ps. lxxiii. 19).

II.

Having loved sin till death, the sinner has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord will justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought; because what he will then do will be done through necessity.

Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls: *His heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil* (Job xli. 15). Instead of yielding to the graces and inspirations of God, and being softened by them, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he will find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last*. Sinners, says the Lord, have,

for the love of creatures, turned their back upon Me. *They have turned their back upon me and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise and deliver us! Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee.* (Jer. ii. 27). They will have recourse to God at death; but He will say to them: Is it to Me you have recourse now? Call on creatures to succour you, for they have been your gods! The Lord will address them in this manner, because, in seeking Him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, will never die a good death.

I am sorry for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. I have done evil, I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if Thou dost not help me by Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus, the rebel who has so grievously outraged Thy Majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by Thy Blood and Thy life. Through the merits then of Thy Passion and Death, receive me into Thy arms and give me holy perseverance. I was lost, Thou hast called me back: I will resist no longer: to Thee I consecrate myself. Bind me to Thy love and never permit me to lose Thee by again losing Thy grace. My Jesus, do not permit it. Mary, my Queen, do not permit it: obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

Spiritual Reading

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO DESPISE THE WORLD AND TO LOVE THE FAITH.

From an earnest consideration of the illustrious examples of virtue which the Saints have given us during their Martyrdom, oh, how much is to be learned!

When we behold in devout meditation, *the utter contempt* in which the Martyrs held the world and all the allurements of its pompous vanities, we are taught *to despise the fleeting vanities and empty pleasures which it offers its deluded votaries*. Many of them, previous to having been put to torture, had been offered by the tyrants immense rewards, posts of honour and noble marriages, to induce them to abandon the Faith. Yet they not only indignantly refused them, but willingly renounced the riches and hon-

ours which they already held, and offered themselves to tortures the most excruciating and deaths the most ignominious, in order not to lose those heavenly graces which a benign Providence fails not to impart to the servants of the Lord, as the earnest of the eternal blessings which shall be the recompense of their fidelity. To St. Clement of Ancyra the tyrant offered a great quantity of gold and precious stones if he would deny the Name of the Lord Jesus; but the Saint, raising his eyes to Heaven, exclaimed: "And is it thus, O my God, that men treat Thee! -- to compare Thee to dust and dross!" The pontifical dignity was offered to St. Theodore of Amasea, as a reward if he gave up the Faith. The holy Martyr, ridiculing the proposal, replied: "Pontifical dignity! I am about to enjoy God forever in Heaven; and is it likely, think you, that I should prefer remaining on earth, to follow the trade of cook and butcher like your priests who offer sacrifice to false gods?"

From the example of the Martyrs *we learn also to place our hope in God, and to become daily more enamoured of the excellence of our Faith*: since in their constancy we cannot help admiring the wonderful power of God which enabled them to encounter torments and death with heroic fortitude and ecstatic joy. For without the interposition of the most powerful assistance from Heaven, how could persons of a delicate constitution, or in the tottering decrepitude of age, how could tender virgins and children be equal to tortures, the bare recital of which fills us with horror? Caldrons of boiling oil and liquid pitch; red-hot coats of mail; hooks to pull out the eyes and teeth; irons combs to tear off the flesh; fires quick to consume, or tediously to torture; scourging until bones and bowels appeared: beheading, quartering, lacerating, impaling -- these were only some of the ingredients of the Martyr's cup.

St. Barlaam, a poor labourer of a village in Antioch, having evinced extraordinary fortitude during his sufferings, and been scourged until the executioners had exhausted their strength, was forced by the tyrant to hold his hand over the flame that burned before the shrine of an idol. At the same time burning coals were placed with some incense upon his hand, in the hope that he might be obliged by the pain to let the burning incense

fall upon the altar, and thus afford them the opportunity of asserting that he had sacrificed to the idols; but the constancy of the Saint was greater than their malice -- he allowed his flesh to be burned to the bone, and expired in the effort.

St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom have eulogized this Martyr.

St. Eulalia affords another instance of the wonderful aid the Almighty gives to those who are devoted to His service. She was a youthful virgin, of only twelve years. The tyrant ordered her to be cruelly scourged, and then caused boiling oil to be poured into the wounds, and burning torches to be applied to her breasts and sides. During these tortures she ceased not to praise the Lord. Her joints were entirely dislocated, the flesh torn from her bones with iron hooks, and she was finally burned alive, having baffled the ingenuity of her inhuman executioners.

The Martyrdom, also, of St. Vitus and St. Agapitus shows us the wonderful assistance of grace, which never fails the servants of the Lord. The former when only fourteen years of age, was scourged, racked, and torn with irons. His father who was a Gentile, wept with anguish to see his son expire in such torments. "No, father," exclaimed the boy, "I do not die: I go to live with Christ forever!" St. Agapitus, also a youth, evinced the same fortitude. The tyrant threatened that he would place upon his head a red-hot helmet: "And what better fortune could await me," said the Saint, "than to exchange your instrument of torture for a heavenly crown?" Then the emperor ordered that red-hot coals should be placed on his head, that he be scourged, and suspended by the feet over a thick smoke. He afterwards had boiling water poured over his breast, and finally had him beheaded.

The triumph of divine grace in the aged was manifested in St. Simeon, who at the age of one hundred and twenty endured the most excruciating tortures and expired on a cross, as is related by Eusebius of Caesarea. St. Philip, Bishop of Heraclea, in his decrepit old age, was dragged by the feet through the city, scourged till his bowels appeared, and afterwards burned alive. The venerable Martyr, till his last breath, ceased not to return thanks to the Lord Who had made him worthy to die for His glory.

Evening Meditation

HE HATH LOVED US AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD.

I.

So, then, my Jesus, in order to save my soul, Thou hast prepared a bath of thine own Blood wherein to cleanse it from the filth of its sins. If, therefore, our souls have been bought by Thy Blood, *for you are bought with a great price* (1 Cor. vi. 20), it is a sign that Thou lovest them much; and as Thou dost love them, let us pray thus to Thee: *We therefore pray thee to help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.* (Te Deum). It is true that by my sins I have separated myself from Thee and have knowingly lost Thee. But remember, my Jesus, that Thou hast purchased me with Thy Blood. Ah, may this Blood not have been given in vain for me, which was shed with so much grief and so much love!

By my sins I have driven Thee, my God, from my soul, and have merited Thy hatred; but Thou hast said that Thou wouldst forget the crimes of a repentant sinner. *But if he do penance ... I will not remember all his iniquities* (Ezech. xviii. 21). Thou hast also said, *I love them that love Me* (Prov. viii. 17). I pray Thee, therefore, my Jesus, to forget all the injuries that I have offered Thee, and love me; whilst I also will now love Thee more than myself, and repent above all things for having offended Thee. Ah, my beloved Lord, for the sake of that Blood Thou hast shed for the love of me, hate me no longer, but love me. It is not enough for me that Thou shouldst only forgive me the chastisement I deserve, I desire to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. O God, Who art all love, all goodness, unite me and bind me to Thyself, and permit not that I should ever again be separated from Thee and deserve Thy hatred. No, my Jesus, my Love, let it not be, I will be all Thine, and I desire that Thou shouldst be all mine.

II.

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death; even the death of the cross (Phil. ii. 8).

What great thing is it that the Martyrs did in giving their lives for God, while this God humbled himself to the death of the Cross for their love! To render a just return for the death of

a God, it would not be sufficient to sacrifice the lives of all men; the death of another God for His love would alone compensate for it. O my Jesus, allow me, a poor sinner, to say to Thee with Thy true lover, St. Francis of Assisi: "May I die, Lord, for the love of Thy love, Who, for the love of my love didst deign to die."

Is it true, my Redeemer, that hitherto, for the love of my own pleasures, I, unhappy that I am, renounced Thy love? Would that I had died before I had ever offended Thee! I thank Thee that Thou givest me time to love Thee in this life that I may afterwards love Thee throughout all eternity. Ah, remind me continually, my Jesus, of the ignominious death Thou hast suffered for me, that I may never forget to love Thee in consideration of the love Thou hast borne me. I love Thee, infinite Goodness; I love Thee, my supreme Good. To Thee I give myself entirely, and by that love which caused Thee to die for me, do Thou accept my love; and let me die, destroy me, rather than ever permit me to leave off loving Thee. I will say to Thee, with St. Francis de Sales: "O Eternal Love, my soul seeks Thee and chooses Thee for all eternity! Come, O Holy Spirit and inflame our hearts with Thy love. Either to love or to die! To die to all other affections, to live only to the love of Jesus!"

Saturday--Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE IMITATION OF MARY

Now, therefore, ye children, hear me: Blessed are they that keep my ways ... Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates (Prov. viii. 32, 34).

Blessed is he who, like the poor who stand before the gates of the rich, is careful to seek for the alms of graces before the doors of the mercy of Mary! And thrice blessed is he who moreover seeks to imitate the virtues which he remarks in Mary, and more especially her purity and humility.

I.

St. Augustine says that to obtain with more certainty and in greater abundance the favour of the Saints, we must imitate them; for when they see us practising their virtues, they are moved all the more to pray for us. The Queen of Saints and our

principal Advocate, Mary, has no sooner delivered a soul from Lucifer's grasp and united it to God, than she desires that it should begin to imitate her virtues, otherwise she cannot enrich it with the graces that she would wish, seeing it so opposed to her in conduct. Therefore Mary calls those blessed who with diligence imitate her life: *Now, therefore, ye children, hear me; blessed are they that keep my ways*

Whosoever loves, resembles the person loved, or endeavours to become like that person, according to the well-known proverb: *Love either finds or makes it like*. Hence St. Sophronius exhorts us, if we love Mary, to endeavour to imitate her, because this is the greatest act of homage we can offer her. "Let the child, then," says St. Bernard, "endeavour to imitate his Mother, if he desires her favour; for Mary seeing herself treated as a Mother will treat him as her child."

O my Mother, I love thee, but I fear I do not love thee as I ought. I know that love makes lovers like to the person loved. If, then, I see myself so unlike thee, it is a mark that I do not love thee. Thou art so pure, and I, defiled with many sins! Thou so humble, and I so proud! Thou so holy and I so wicked. This, then, is what thou hast to do, O Mary, since thou lovest me! Make me like thyself. Thou hast all power to change hearts; take mine and change it. Show the world thou canst do it for those that love thee. Make me thy worthy child.

II.

As the devotion most dear to Mary is to endeavour to imitate her virtues, it would be well, therefore, to propose to ourselves the imitation of some virtue that corresponds to her Festivals. As, for example, on the Feast of her Immaculate Conception, purity of intention; on her Nativity, renewal of spirit and to throw off tepidity; on her Presentation, detachment from something to which we are most attached; on her Annunciation, humility in supporting contempt; on her Visitation, charity towards our neighbour, in giving alms, or at least in praying for sinners; on her Purification, obedience to Superiors. And finally, on the Feast of her Assumption, let us endeavour to detach ourselves from this world, to do all we can to prepare ourselves for death, and regulate each day of our lives as if it were our last.

"Mary was such," says St. Ambrose, "that her life alone was a model for all ... Let the virginity and life of Mary be to you as a faithful image in which the form of virtue is resplendent. Thence learn how to live, what to avoid, what to retain."

O Mother of mercy, behold I, the most miserable of all men, have now recourse to Thy compassion in order that thou mayest grant me what I ask. Others may ask bodily health, worldly goods and advantages, but I come, O Lady, to ask thee for that which thou desirest of me and which is most agreeable to thy most holy heart. Thou who wast so humble, obtain for me humility and love of contempt. Thou who wast so patient under the sufferings of this life, obtain for me patience in trials. Thou who wast all filled with the love of God, obtain for me His pure and holy love. Thou who wast all love towards thy neighbour, obtain for me charity towards my neighbour. Thou, in fine, art the most holy of all creatures, O Mary, make me a Saint. Thou canst do all things, O my Mother, my hope, my love, my refuge, my help and my consolation. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

THE MARTYRS TEACH US PATIENCE, THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER AND THE LOVE OF GOD.

From the *Patience* which the Martyrs displayed during their tortures, *we should learn to suffer with holy resignation the crosses and afflictions of this life.* Poverty, sickness, persecution, contumely, injustice, and all other evils are but trifling when compared with their sufferings. The reflection that it was the will of God that they should suffer for His love, was their only solace. We also in our tribulations should remember the necessity of resignation to the Divine will; and, calling to mind the more grievous sufferings of the Martyrs, should blush to complain. St. Vincent de Paul used to say: "Conformity to the Divine will is a sovereign remedy for all our trials."

It may be useful here to remark, with St. Augustine, that it is not the *torture* but the *cause* which makes the martyr. Whence St. Thomas teaches that Martyrdom is to suffer death in the exercise of an act of virtue, from which we may infer that not only he who by the hands of the executioner lays down his life for the Faith, but whoever dies in order to comply with the Divine will,

and to please God, is a Martyr, since in sacrificing himself to the Divine love he performs an act of the most exalted virtue. We all have to pay the great debt of nature; let us therefore endeavour in holy prayer, to obtain resignation to the Divine will -- to receive death and every tribulation in conformity with the dispensations of God's Providence. As often as we perform this act of resignation with sufficient fervour, we may hope to be made partakers of the merits of the Martyrs. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, in reciting the *Gloria Patri*, etc. in the Office, always bowed her head in the same spirit as she would have done in receiving the stroke of the executioner.

The example of the Martyrs teaches us also to have *immediate recourse* to the assistance of God by earnest supplication, when we feel ourselves disconsolate or weak under affliction. Thus acted the holy Martyrs. As their torture increased they multiplied their prayers and secured the victory. St. Theodore, after a long endurance of his tortures, was stretched upon burning tiles; feeling the pain penetrating to his very heart, he besought the Lord to sweeten his suffering; and so persevered to the end. There have been on the contrary examples of Christians, who, failing to invoke the assistance of the Almighty, have fallen off from the confession of the Faith, and forfeited the glorious crown. An example is found in the Acts of the Martyrs of Japan. An aged man, having been condemned to a protracted Martyrdom, endured the torture for a considerable time, but failing to invoke heavenly aid, denied his Faith a few moments before he expired -- a startling warning to all, that perseverance in prayer in times of temptations and distress is that which alone can assure us the victory.

But the most important lesson that we learn from the martyrs is to love God: *He who loveth not abideth in death* (Jo. iii. 14). We cannot manifest our love of God by a multitude of actions performed for His glory so well as by a willingness to suffer for His sake. St. Gordianus replied to the tyrant who threatened to put him to death if he did not deny the Name of Jesus: "You threaten death! But my greatest regret is, that I can die only once for Jesus Christ!" In a similar manner St. Procopius exclaimed to the tyrant, who was directing further tortures: "Torment as

much as thou wilt, but know that to one who truly loves Jesus Christ, nothing is dearer than to suffer for His sake." "And did the Saints speak thus," asks St. Bernard, "because they were in a state of stupor or insensible to torments?" No, says the holy Doctor, it was neither stupor nor insensibility, but *their love of Jesus Christ* which caused them to esteem it all joy to suffer and to die for His glory. This ardent love of God is certainly the greatest spiritual advantage to be derived from the perusal of the Acts of the Martyrs; the recollection of their conduct will make us ashamed to repine under the tribulations Divine Providence sends us, and will strengthen us to receive them with resignation.

Evening Meditation

"WHY WILL YOU DIE, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?"

I.

St. Paul says that Jesus Christ, by dying for us, was made our justification: *He is made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption* (1 Cor. i. 30). "Justice," comments St. Bernard, "in the washing-away of sins." Yes, for God, accepting on our behalf the torments and death of Jesus Christ, is obliged to pardon us by virtue of the compact made: *Him that knew no sin, for us he hath made sin, that we might be made the justice of God in him* (2 Cor. v. 21). The innocent One was made a Victim for our sins in order that forgiveness through His merits might of right belong to us. For this reason David prays God to save him, not only for His Mercy's sake, but likewise for the sake of His Justice: *Deliver me in thy justice* (Ps. xxx. 2).

The eagerness of God to save sinners was always immense. This eagerness led Him to reproach them with that cry: *Return, ye transgressors, to the heart* (Is. xlvi. 8). Sinners, enter once more into your own hearts; think of the benefits you have received from Me, of the love I have borne you, and offend Me no more. *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you* (Zack. i. 3). Return to Me, and I will receive you into my embraces: *Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live* (Ezech. xviii. 31). My children, why will you destroy yourselves, and of your own free-will condemn yourselves to everlasting death? Return to Me and you shall live.

In a word, His infinite mercy induced Him to descend from Heaven to earth to come and free us from eternal death: *Through*

the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us (Luke i. 73). But here we must be mindful of what St. Paul says. Previously to God becoming Man He was full of mercy for us; but He could not feel compassion for our miseries, because compassion implies suffering, and God is incapable of suffering. Now, says the Apostle, in order to be moved also with compassion for us the Eternal Word willed to become Man, capable of suffering, and similar to other men who are affected with compassion, so that He might be able not only to save us, but also to compassionate us: *For we have not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin* (Heb. iv. 15). And in another passage: *It behoved him, in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful high priest* (Heb. ii. 17).

So, then, my Jesus, Thou art my God, and not being able to die as God, Thou hast been pleased to become Man capable of dying in order to give Thy life for me. My sweet Redeemer, how is it that, at the sight of such mercy and love Thou hast shown towards me, I do not die of grief? Thou didst come down from Heaven to seek me, a lost sheep, and how many times have I not driven Thee away, preferring my miserable pleasures before Thee! But since Thou dost wish to have me, I leave all; I wish to be Thine, and I will have none other but Thee.

II.

Oh, what tender compassion Jesus Christ has for poor sinners! This makes Him say He is that Shepherd Who goes about seeking the lost sheep, and on finding it He prepares a feast saying: *Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost. And he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing* (Luke xv. 4, 6); and thus He carefully keeps possession of it in His fond embrace for fear He should again lose it. This, too, caused Him to say He is that loving Father Who, whenever a prodigal son that has left Him returns to His feet, does not thrust him away, but embraces him, kisses him, and as it were, faints away for the consolation and fondness which He feels in beholding His repentance: *And running to him, he fell upon his neck and kissed him* (Luke xv. 20). This causes Him to say: *I stand at the gate and knock* (Apoc. iii. 20); that is, although driven away from the soul by sin, He does

not abandon her, but He places Himself outside the door of her heart and knocks by His calls to gain re-admittance. Hence He said to His disciples who with indiscreet zeal would have called down vengeance on those who repulsed them: *You know not of what spirit you are* (Luke ix. 55). You see I have so much compassion on sinners; and do you desire vengeance on them? You are not of My spirit. Finally, this compassion made Him say: *Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you* (Matt. xi. 28). Come to me, all you that are afflicted and tormented with the weight of your sins, and I will give you peace.

Ah, my Jesus, make me know the evil I have committed, and the love which Thou desirest to have. But since Thou hast borne with me till now, permit me not to give Thee any more cause for sorrow. Inflammé me altogether with Thy love, and remind me always of all Thou hast suffered for me, that from this day forth I may forget everything, and think of nothing but loving and pleasing Thee. Thou didst come on earth to reign in our hearts; take, then, from my heart all that could prevent Thee from possessing it entirely. Make my will to be wholly conformed to Thy will; may Thy will be my will, and may it be the rule of all my actions and desires.

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"BE NOT WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS."

Be not wise in your own conceits (Ep. of Sunday. Rom. xii. 16-21).

The wise Christian looks to the future, that is, to the account he must render at the hour of death. Sinners think only of the present, and regard not the end for which they were created. *Oh that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end!* (Deut. xxxii. 29).

I.

Sinners are foolish; the Saints are truly wise. "A man not truly wise," says St. Bernard, "who is not wise towards himself," that is, by taking special care to secure for himself eternal happiness. Sinners think only of the present, but regard not the end for which they were created. Yet what will it profit them to gain

all things if they attain not their last end, which alone can make them happy? *But one thing is necessary* (Luke x. 42). To attain our end is the only thing necessary for us: if we fail in that, all is lost. What is this end? *Life everlasting* (Rom. vi. 22). During life sinners care but little for the attainment of this end. Each day brings them nearer to death and to eternity; but they know not their destination. Should a pilot who is asked whither he is going, answer that he did not know, would not all, says St. Augustine, cry out that he was bringing the vessel to destruction? The Saint then adds: "Such a one runs well but off the right road."

These are the wise ones of the world who know so well how to acquire wealth and honours, and to indulge in every kind of amusement, but know not how to save their souls. How miserable the rich glutton, who, though able to lay up riches and to live splendidly, was, after death, buried in hell! How miserable Alexander the Great, who, after gaining so many kingdoms, was condemned to eternal torments! How great the folly of Henry the Eighth who rebelled against the Church, but seeing at the hour of death that his soul would be lost, cried out in despair: "Friends, we have lost all!" O God, how many others now weep in hell, and exclaim: *What hath pride profited us? Or what advantages hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow* (Wis. v. 8). In the world we cut a great figure; we enjoyed abundant riches and honours; and now all is passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains for us but to suffer and weep for eternity! St. Augustine says that the *happiness* which sinners enjoy in this life is their *greatest misfortune* for thereby their perverse will, an internal enemy, is strengthened.

In fine, the words of Solomon are fulfilled with regard to all who neglect their salvation: *Mourning taketh hold of the end of joy* (Prov. xiv. 13). All their pleasures, honours, and greatness end in eternal sorrow and wailing. *Whilst I was yet beginning he cut me off* (Is. xxxviii. 12). Whilst they were laying the foundation of their hopes of realizing a fortune, death comes, and cutting the thread of life, deprives them of all their possessions, and sends them to hell to burn forever in a pit of fire. What greater folly can be conceived than to wish to be transformed from the friend of God into the slave of Lucifer, and from the heir of Paradise to

be, by sin, doomed to hell? For the moment a Christian commits a mortal sin, his name is written among the number of the damned! St. Francis de Sales said that if the Angels were capable of weeping, they would do nothing else but shed tears at the sight of the destruction a Christian who commits mortal sin brings upon himself.

Dear Jesus, have pity upon me! I have forgotten Thee, but Thou didst not forget me. O my God, enlighten me and assist me.

II.

Consider how great is the folly of sinners, who, by living in sin, lead even here on earth a life of misery and discontent. All the goods of this world cannot content the heart of man which has been created to love God, and can find no peace out of God. What are all the grandeurs and all the pleasures of this world but *vanity of vanities*? (Eccles. i. 12). What are they but *vanity and vexation of spirit*? (Eccles. iv. 16). Earthly goods are, according to Solomon who had experience of them, *vanity of vanities*; that is, mere vanities, lies, and deceits. They are also *a vexation of spirit*. They not only do not content, but they even afflict the soul; and the more abundantly they are possessed, the greater the anguish they produce. Sinners hope to find peace in their sins; but what peace can they enjoy? *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord* (Is. xlviii. 22). God gives peace to souls who love Him, and not to those who despise Him. Instead of seeking to be the friends of God, sinners wish to be the slaves of Satan who is a cruel and merciless tyrant to all who submit to his yoke. And if he promises delights, he does it, as St. Cyprian says, not for our welfare, but that we may be the companions of his torments in hell.

O my God, permit me not to become any more so blind as to prefer my own unlawful gratifications before Thee. I now detest them and I love Thee above all things. O Mary, my Mother, help me to love Jesus.

Spiritual Reading

STRONG FAITH AND WEAK FAITH

Jesus said to them that followed him: Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel. (Gospel of Sunday. Matt. viii. 1, 13).

He that loves Jesus Christ believes all His words, and his

Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Whoever loves a person believes all that proceeds from the lips of that person; consequently the more a soul loves Jesus Christ, the more lively and unshaken is her Faith. When the Good Thief beheld our Redeemer, though He had done no ill, suffering death upon the Cross with such patience, he began at once to love Him; under the influence of this love, and of the Divine light which then broke upon his soul, he believed that this was truly the Son of God, and begged not to be forgotten by Him when He should have passed into His kingdom.

Faith is the foundation of Charity; but Faith afterwards receives her perfection from Charity. His Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Charity produces in man not merely the Faith of the understanding, but the Faith of the will also: those who believe only with the understanding, but not with the will, as is the case with sinners who are perfectly convinced of the Truths of the Faith, but who do not choose to live according to the Divine Commandments, -- such as these have a very weak Faith; for had they a more lively belief that the grace of God is a priceless treasure, and that sin, because it robs us of this grace, is the worst of evils, they would assuredly change their lives. If, then, they prefer the miserable creatures of this earth to God, it is because they either do not believe, or because their Faith is very weak. On the contrary, he who believes not only with the understanding, but also with the will, so that he not only believes, but has the will to believe in God, the Revealer of Truth, from the love he has for Him, and rejoices in so believing, -- such a one has a perfect Faith, and consequently seeks to make his life conformable to the truths that he believes.

Weakness of Faith, however, in those who live in sin, does not spring from the obscurity of Faith; for though God, in order to make our Faith more meritorious, has veiled the objects of Faith in darkness and secrecy, He has at the same time given us such clear and convincing evidence of their truth, that not to believe them would argue not merely a lack of sense, but sheer madness and impiety. The weakness of the Faith of many persons is to be traced to the *wickedness of living*. He who, rather than forego the enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, scorns the

Divine friendship, would wish there were no law to forbid, and no chastisement to punish, his sin; on this account, he strives to blind himself to the Eternal Truths of Death, Judgment, and Hell, and of Divine justice; and because such subjects strike too much terror into his heart, and are too apt to mix bitterness in his cup of pleasure, he sets his brain to work to discover proofs, which have at least the look of plausibility, and by which he allows himself to be flattered into the persuasion that there is neither soul, nor God, nor hell, in order that he may live and die like the brute beasts, without laws and without reason.

And this laxity of morals is the source whence have issued, and still issue daily, so many books and systems of Materialists, Indifferentists, Deists, and Naturalists. Some among them deny the Divine Existence, and some Divine Providence, saying that God, after having created men, takes no further notice of them, and is heedless whether they love or hate Him, whether they be saved or lost; others, again, deny the goodness of God, and maintain that He has created numberless souls for hell, becoming Himself their tempter to sin, that so they may damn themselves, and go into everlasting fire, to curse Him there for ever!

Oh, ingratitude and wickedness of men! God has created them in His mercy, to make them eternally happy in Heaven; He has poured on them so many lights, benefits, and graces, to bring them to Eternal Life; for the same end He has redeemed them at the price of so many sorrows and sufferings; and yet they strive to deny all, that they may give free rein to their vicious inclinations! But no, let them strive as they will, the unhappy beings cannot wrest themselves from remorse of conscience, and the dread of the Divine vengeance. Oh, if they would but once forsake sin, and apply themselves earnestly to the love of Jesus Christ, they would then most certainly cast away all doubts about things of Faith, and firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed!*

*St. Alphonsus published a dogmatic work, *The Truth of the Faith*, in which he clearly showed the folly of all the systems of modern unbelievers. -- EDITOR.

The true lover of Jesus Christ keeps the Eternal Truths constantly in view, and orders all his actions according to them. Oh,

how thoroughly does he who loves Jesus Christ understand the force of that saying of the Wise Man, *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity*; that all earthly greatness is mere smoke, dirt and delusion; that the soul's only welfare and happiness consist in loving her Creator, and in doing His blessed will; that we are, in reality, no more than what we are before God; that it is of no use to gain the whole world, if the soul be lost; that all the goods in the world can never satisfy the human heart, but only God Himself; and, in fine, that we must leave all in order to gain all.

Charity believeth all things (1 Cor. xiii. 7). There are other Christians, -- though not so perverse as the class we have mentioned, who would fain believe in nothing, that they may give full scope to their unruly passions, and live on undisturbed by the stings of remorse, -- there are others, I say, who believe indeed, but their Faith is languid; they believe the most holy Mysteries of Religion, the Truths of Revelation contained in the Gospel, -- the Trinity, the Redemption, the holy Sacraments, and the rest; still they do not believe all. Jesus Christ has said: *Blessed are the poor; Blessed are they that hunger; Blessed are they that suffer persecution; Blessed are you when men shall revile you and shall say all manner of evil against you* (Matt. v. 3-11). This is the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. How, then, can it be said, that those believe in the Gospel who say: "Blessed are those who have money! Blessed are those who suffer nothing! Blessed are those who can take their amusements; and pitiable is the man that suffers persecution and ill-treatment from others!" We must certainly say of such as these, that either they do not believe the Gospel, or that they believe only *a part of it*. He who believes it all esteems it his highest fortune, and a mark of the Divine favour in this world, to be poor, to be sick, to be mortified, to be despised and ill-treated by men. Such is the belief and such the language of one who believes all that is said in the Gospel and has a real love for Jesus Christ.

Evening Meditation

THE SAINTS ARE TRULY WISE

I.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are those who know how to love God and to gain Heaven. Happy the man to whom

God has given the *science of the Saints* (Sap. x. 10). Oh, how sublime that science which teaches us to know how to love God and to save our souls! Happy, says St. Augustine, is the man "who knows God, although he may be ignorant of other things." They who know God, the love which He deserves, and how to love Him, stand not in need of any other knowledge. They are wiser than those who are masters of many sciences, but know not how to love God. Brother Egidius of the Order of St. Francis, once said to St. Bonaventure: Happy you, O Father Bonaventure, who are so learned, and who by your learning, can become more holy than I can who am but a poor ignorant man. The Saint replied: "If an old woman loves God more than I do, she is more learned and more holy than I am." At hearing this, Brother Egidius exclaimed: "O poor old woman! Poor old woman! hear what Father Bonaventure says. If you love God more than he does, you can surpass him in sanctity."

It was this excited the emulation of St. Augustine and made him ashamed of himself. He exclaimed: "The ignorant rise up and bear away the kingdom of Heaven," and what are we, the learned ones of this world doing? Oh! how many of the rude and illiterate are saved, who, though they know not how to read, know how to love God, and how many of the wise ones of the world are damned! Oh, truly wise were St. John of God, St. Felix of Cantalicio, and St. Paschal, poor Franciscan lay-brothers, who were unacquainted with human sciences but learned in the *science of the Saints*. But the wonder is, that, though worldlings themselves are fully persuaded of this truth, and constantly extol the merits of those who retire from the world to live only for God, still they act as if they believed it not.

II.

Tell me, to which class do you wish to belong -- to the wise ones of the world, or to the wise ones of God? Before you make a choice, St. John Chrysostom advises you to go to the graves of the dead! Oh, how eloquently do the sepulchres of the dead teach us the science of the Saints and the vanity of all earthly goods! "For my part," says the Saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, bones and worms." Among these skeletons I cannot distinguish the noble, the rich, or the learned; I see that they have all

become dust and rottenness. Thus all their greatness and glory have passed away like a dream!

What, then, must we do? Listen to the advice of St. Paul: *This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short: it remaineth that ... they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away* (1 Cor. vii. 29, 31). This world is a scene which shall pass away and end very soon: *The time is short*. During the days of life that remain, let us endeavour to live like men who are wise not according to the world, but according to God, by attending to the sanctification of our souls, and by adopting the means of salvation; by avoiding dangerous occasions; by practising prayer; joining some pious Sodality; frequenting the Sacraments; reading every day a spiritual book; and if it be in our power, by daily hearing Mass, or, at least, visiting Jesus in the Holy-Sacrament of the altar, and an image of the most holy Mary. Thus we shall be truly wise and be happy for time and for eternity.

Monday--Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

LET US HASTEN TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD.

To secure a happy death the Saints abandoned all things. They left their country; they renounced the delights and the hopes the world held out to them and embraced a life of Poverty and Contempt. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?*

I.

David calls the happiness of this life *the dream of them that awake* (Ps. lxxii. 20). In explaining these words, a certain author says: The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing: like a dream that lasts but a little and afterwards vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time. The thought that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The Saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the Empress Isabella to Grenada. When the coffin was opened her appearance was so horrible and the smell so intolerable that all had to retire. St. Francis remained to contemplate in the dead body of his sovereign the vanity of the world; and looking at it he exclaimed: "Are you, then, my empress? Are you the queen

before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone?" "Thus, then," he said within himself, "end the greatness and the crowns of this world! I will henceforth serve a Master Who can never die!" From that moment he consecrated himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a Religious, should his wife die before him. This vow he afterwards fulfilled by entering the Society of Jesus.

Justly, then, has a person who was undeceived written on a skull these words: *Cogitanti vilescent omnia*. To him who reflects on death, everything in this world appears contemptible. He cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world? It is because they do not think of death. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?* (Ps. iv. 3). Miserable children of Adam, says the Holy Ghost, why do you not chase away from your heart so many earthly affections which make you love vanity and lies? What has happened to your forefathers must befall you. They dwelt in the same palace which you inhabit, and slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, will be your lot.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me had I died when I was at a distance from Thee? May Thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed! I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. I did not then love Thee, and I cared but little to be loved by Thee. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that Thou hast already pardoned me.

II.

Give yourself, then, to God before death comes upon you. *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly* (Eccles. ix. 10). What you can do today, defer not till tomorrow; for a day once passed never returns, and tomorrow death may come, and prevent you from ever more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from everything which removes, or can remove, you from God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of

this earth, before death strips us of them by force. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord* (Apoc. xiv. 13). Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the Good they love it unites them to the Supreme Good, Who is the sole object of their affections, and Who will render them happy for eternity.

O my sweet Saviour, would that I had died a thousand times before I sinned against Thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend Thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths rather than permit me evermore to lose Thy grace. I was once the slave of hell; but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul! Thou hast said that Thou *lovest those that love thee* (Prov. viii. 17). I love Thee. Therefore I am Thine and Thou art mine. I may lose Thee at some future time; but the grace which I ask of Thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose Thee again. Unasked, Thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces; I cannot now fear that Thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose Thee. Give me Thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope, intercede for me.

Spiritual Reading

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO ACCEPT DEATH ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD.

PRAYING TO THE HOLY MARTYRS

Death, which is the tribute that everyone must pay, is the greatest of all our tribulations and makes not only sinners but the just tremble. Our Saviour Himself as Man wished to show the fear that He felt in the face of death, so that He began to pray to His Father to free Him from it. But at the same time He teaches us to accept death according to the good pleasure of God, by saying: *Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done* (Matt. xxvi. 39). We can all acquire the glory of Martyrdom by accepting death to please God and conform ourselves to His will. For, as we have remarked with St. Augustine, it is not *the pain*, but *the cause* or *the end* for which one submits to death that makes Martyrs. It follows that he who in dying courageously accepts death and all the pains that accompany it, in order to accomplish the Divine will,

though he does not receive death at the hands of the executioner, dies, however, with the merit of Martyrdom, or at least with merit very similar. It also follows that as often as any one offers himself to undergo Martyrdom for the love of God, so often does he gain the merit of Martyrdom. We have seen how St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, when she inclined the head at the *Glory be to the Father*, imagined at the same moment she was receiving the stroke of the executioner. Hence we shall see in Heaven a great number of Saints crowned with the merit of Martyrdom without having been martyred.

Finally we should be moved to *recommend ourselves every day with great confidence to the intercession of the holy Martyrs* whose prayers are most efficacious with God. When we suffer some grievous pain, or when we desire a special favour, let us make a Novena or a Triduum in honour of the holy Martyrs, and we shall easily obtain the grace we ask. Let us not fail to honour them, says St. Ambrose, for they are our Princes in the Faith and our powerful intercessors. If the Lord promises a reward to him who gives a drink of water to a poor man, what will He not do for those who for His sake sacrificed their lives in the midst of torments! Let us here observe that the Martyrs before receiving the mortal blow, without doubt prepared themselves many times for those many tortures and for death, so that when they closed their earthly career they died with the merit of not only one Martyrdom, but with the merit of all those Martyrdoms that they had already accepted and offered sincerely to God. Hence we may imagine with what abundance of merits they entered Heaven, and how valuable is their mediation with God.

A Prayer to the Holy Martyrs to Obtain their Protection

O ye blessed Princes of the Heavenly Kingdom! Ye who sacrificed to Almighty God the honours, the riches, and possessions of this life, and have received in return the unfading glory and never-ending joys of Heaven! Ye who are secure in the everlasting possession of the brilliant crown of glory which your sufferings have obtained! -- look with compassion upon our wretched state in this valley of tears where we groan in the uncertainty of what may be our eternal destiny. And from that Divine Saviour for Whom you suffered so many torments, and Who now repays

you with such unspeakable glory, obtain for us that we may love Him with all our heart, and receive in return the grace of perfect resignation under the trials of this life, fortitude under the temptations of the enemy, and perseverance to the end. May your powerful intercession obtain for us that we may one day in your blessed company sing the praises of the Eternal God and, even as you now do, face to face, enjoy the Beatitude of His vision!

Evening Meditation

"GOD HIMSELF WILL COME AND SAVE YOU" (Is. xxxv. 1).

I.

God is that strong One Who alone can be called strong, because He is Strength itself; and whoever is strong derives strength from Him: *Strength is mine, and by me kings reign* (Prov. viii. 14), says the Lord. God is that mighty One Who can do whatsoever He will; and He can do this with ease; He has merely to wish it: *Behold, thou hast made heaven and earth by thy great power, and no word shall be hard to thee* (Jer. xxxii. 17). By a nod He created the Heavens and earth out of nothing: *He spoke, and they were made* (Ps. cxlviii. 5). And did He choose to do so, He could destroy the immense machinery of the universe by a nod, as He created it: *At a beck he can utterly destroy the whole world* (2 Mach. viii. 18). We know already how when he pleased, He burnt five entire cities with a deluge of fire. We know how, previously to that, He inundated the whole earth with a Deluge of waters, to the destruction of all mankind, with the sole exception of eight persons. *O Lord*, says the Wise Man: *who shall resist the strength of thy arm?* (Wis. xi. 22).

Hence we may see the rashness of the sinner who wrestles against God, and carries his audacity so far as even to lift up his hand against the Almighty: *He hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty* (Job. xv. 25). Suppose we should see an ant make an assault upon a soldier, would we not think it rashness? But how much more rash is it for a man to make an assault on the Creator Himself, and scorn His Precepts, disregard His threats, despise His grace, and declare himself God's enemy!

O great Son of God, Thou hast become Man in order to

make Thyself loved by men; but where, then, is the love that men bear to Thee? Thou hast given Thy Blood and Thy life to save our souls, and why are we so ungrateful to Thee, that, instead of loving Thee, we despise Thee with such ingratitude? Alas! I myself, Lord, have been one of those who more than others have thus ill-treated Thee. But Thy Passion is my hope. Oh, for the sake of the love that induced Thee to assume human flesh, and to die for me upon the Cross, forgive me all the offences I have committed against Thee. I love Thee, O Incarnate Word. I love Thee, O my God.

II.

But these rash and ungrateful ones are the very men whom the Son of God has come to save, by making Himself Man and by taking on Himself the chastisement deserved by them in order to obtain pardon for them. And then, seeing that man from the wounds inflicted by sin continued very weak and powerless to resist the strength of his enemies, what did God do? The Strong and Almighty One became weak and assumed to Himself the bodily infirmities of man, in order to procure for man by His merits the strength of soul requisite to subdue the attacks of the flesh and of hell. And so, behold Him made a little Child in need of milk to sustain His life, and so feeble that He cannot feed Himself or move Himself.

The Eternal Word, in becoming Man, wished to conceal His strength: *God will come from the south; there is his strength hid* (Hab. iii. 3, 4). We find, says St. Augustine, Jesus Christ strong and feeble -- strong, since He created all things; feeble, since we behold Him made Man like us: "We find Jesus strong and weak; strong, by Whom all things were made without labour. Would you see Him weak? *The Word was made flesh.*" Now this strong One has chosen to become weak, says the Saint, to repair our infirmity by His weakness, and so to obtain our salvation: *He hath built us up by his strength, he hath sought us by his infirmity*. For this reason He likens Himself to the hen, when He speaks to Jerusalem: *How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings! And thou wouldst not* (Matt. xxiii. 37). St. Augustine remarks that the hen in rearing her chickens grows weak, and by this mark is known to be a mother; so was it with

our loving Redeemer, by becoming infirm and weak, He showed Himself the Father and Mother of us poor weak creatures.

I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, and I repent of all the injuries I have done Thee. Would that I could, for Thy sake, die of sorrow! O my Jesus, grant me the gift of Thy love; let me not live any longer ungrateful for the affection Thou hast borne me. I am determined to love Thee always. Give me holy perseverance. O Mary, Mother of God, and my Mother, obtain for me from thy Son the grace to love Him always even unto death.

Tuesday--Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES (January 29th)

HIS FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

They who love God never doubt in matters of Faith. It is only those who do not live according to the dictates of their Faith who doubt its Truths. O my God, cries out St. Francis, the beauty of our holy Faith appears to me so delightful that I could die of love for it!

I.

Great was the Faith of St. Francis de Sales. Such was his delight when he thought of the beauty and excellence of Faith, that he was heard to exclaim, "O my God, the beauty of our holy Faith appears to be so delightful that I could die of love for it, and it seems to me that I ought to enclose this precious gift which God has bestowed upon me, in a heart full of the sweetest perfumes of devotion." Hence he was never satisfied with giving God thanks for having blessed him with the favour of being born a child of the true Church: "O bountiful God," said he, "great indeed are the favours by which Thou hast bound me to Thee; but how shall I ever sufficiently thank Thee for having enlightened me with the true Faith?" And he declared that, although he had constantly had so much to do with heretics, he had never once doubted in the least of the truth of his Faith. They who love God never doubt in matters of Faith: it is only those who do not live according to the dictates of their Faith who doubt of its Truths.

Great also was the Hope of St. Francis. He was always firmly convinced that God continually watches over our welfare, and

hence he was always calm and intrepid in the midst of the greatest dangers. In the very dangers which threatened his designs for the glory of God, he never lost confidence. And this he always endeavoured to instil into others. On one occasion he is related to have said to a timid soul: "Do you desire to belong entirely to God? Why, then, do you fear on account of your weakness? Do you hope in God? And shall he who hopes in God be ever confounded? Be not afraid of your fears." He who loves God much, confides much in Him. Love always cuts out fear.

II.

Great likewise was his love for God. The very fear which he experienced in the early part of his life, that he might not be worthy to love God for all eternity, ruined his health and nearly deprived him of life. It was his great Charity which inspired him to expose himself on so many occasions to death for God's sake. He was so careful to expel from his heart every affection which was not directed towards God, that he said, "If I knew that there existed in my heart a single fibre of affection that is not from God and for God, I would immediately pluck it out." He always aspired to the purest love of God. He said: "I would rather not exist than not be entirely devoted to God." In one of his letters he writes: "My heart is filled with an unbounded desire of being forever sacrificed to the pure love of my Saviour." And he tells us how tender his love was, especially for Jesus Christ, when he says: "Let us contemplate our Divine Redeemer nailed to the Cross and dying upon it for the love of us. Ah! why do we not cast ourselves upon the same Cross to die on it with Him, for His having been pleased through love for us to die Himself upon it? I will embrace Him and will never leave Him. I will die with Him and will burn in the flames of His love. The same flame shall consume the Divine Creator and His creature. I will live and die upon His bosom. Neither life nor death shall ever separate me from Him."

Holy Saint, since thou art now in Heaven loving Jesus face to face, obtain for me the grace to love Him, as thou didst love Him in thy lifetime.

Spiritual Reading

THE VARIOUS TORTURES TO WHICH THE MARTYRS WERE SUBJECTED

The Rev. Father Mamachi, in his erudite work entitled *Manners and Customs of the First Christians*, gives an account of all those tortures suffered by the Martyrs, from the works of ancient writers who were their contemporaries, as St. Justin, Tertullian, Athenagoras, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, and others. This author describes at much length the various species of torture employed against the servants of Jesus Christ during the Ten Persecutions of the Roman Emperors. We shall be more brief, as our intention is merely to show how rich in merit were those sainted heroes when they closed their earthly career.

I. THE MARTYRDOM OF THE CROSS

Some were crucified in an erect posture, the same as Our Lord Jesus Christ; others with the head downwards, as St. Peter, according to Eusebius, who relates this on the authority of Origen; others in the manner in which the Martyrdom of St. Andrew is represented. Many were made to pass their arms under the transverse beam of the Cross, and had their hands nailed upon the upper part. Some were suspended from a tree by the hands, their arms having been first tied behind their backs, and heavy weights attached to their feet. Women were hung up by the hair, the agony of which torture was sufficient to cause death; others were hung by one or both feet, with the head downwards, and in many cases a large stone tied round the neck; finally, many had their hands nailed to a beam, with enormous weights at their feet.

II. THE MARTYRDOM OF FIRE

Some were placed upon gridirons, others plunged into caldrons of boiling oil or pitch. Many were suffocated with smoke, or dressed in a garment smeared with some combustible matter, and so burned at a stake. Some were cast into fiery furnaces; others were crowded into a ship which was set on fire at sea; others were inclosed in a brazen bull and roasted alive; others again were tortured by red-hot plates of iron applied to their sides; and in fine, were thrown upon the earth, and molten lead poured

over them, or were impaled upon a spit and roasted before a slow fire.

III. THE TORTURE OF THE SCOURGE

Scourges were of various kinds -- of leather, of cane, of the tendons of oxen, of iron links, and sometimes of rods of iron, shaped like thorns, which were called *scorpions*. The Martyrs were generally tied to a post, or between four posts, to increase their punishment; but some were placed in a kind of stock. This stock consisted of two large pieces of wood, one above the other, between which the feet of the sufferers were confined, and in this torture they were sometimes scourged; and others were thrown with their backs on a table filled with large nails, and then scourged with sticks or rods.

IV. THE TORTURE OF IRONS

These were iron hooks on which the Christians were suspended, and iron claws that served to tear them to the bone and to their very entrails. Other instruments were destined to pull out all their teeth, one after the other. Their flesh was lacerated with iron combs, or they were flayed. They were tied to the ground and were cut with blows of the hatchet, or their members were gradually cut to pieces, from the toes to their thighs, and from the fingers to the breasts, so that nothing was left but the trunk. They were stretched with their backs against a wheel that dragged them over sharp irons fixed in the ground; or they were tied upon a table, then disembowelled and their intestines taken out.

V. OTHER TORTURES

The Martyrs were also tortured on the rack and with other torments. Sometimes they were exposed to the sun, their bodies being rubbed with honey that they might be stung by the flies and wasps. They were stoned, beheaded, strangled, drowned. There were some who were tied to two trees that had been bent by main force, which when released would tear them asunder. Others tied in a bag were thrown into the sea, or thrown to the dogs or wild beasts. Some were made to die under the press; others perished from hunger.

In some of our narrations the reader may find himself at a loss to account for such barbarity and fierceness as the tyrants

practised upon the Martyrs, whose innocence and meekness might be expected to save them from persecution. Let us consider whence this fury came.

It at first originated in the hatred which the pagans bore towards Christians whose virtues were the strongest censure upon their infamous lives.

It was also caused by the instigation of the devils who vehemently abhorred these pious athletes, the more their example served to propagate the Faith and induce others to imitate them.

The principal reason of the persecution was the hatred that those tyrants conceived against the Martyrs at seeing themselves overcome by children, by tender virgins, by simple and ignorant men, who upbraided them with their insanity in following a false religion which authorized every vice and called upon them to worship as gods men who, during their lives, had given the most horrid examples of turpitude and crime that ever disgraced human nature.

Their rage was yet more increased at the sight of the very many miracles wrought through the servants of the true God. They saw wild beasts cast themselves at the feet of the Martyrs; they perceived that red-hot coals, molten lead, did not burn them, and witnessed other similar prodigies. In vain did they cry out: "This is magic; these are incantations." The people were converted in the presence of these miracles, and thousands of them embraced the Faith, and this redoubled the irritation of the judges.

They believed that they were frightening the Christians by inventing new tortures, and flattered themselves that they were extinguishing the Faith by putting all the Christians to death. But the more they multiplied tortures, and immolated victims, the more did the number of the faithful increase. Tertullian relates that a certain governor in Asia, named Arrius, was putting to death those who confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus, when such a multitude presented themselves before his tribunal as caused him to shudder at the thought of shedding so much blood; he therefore contented himself with putting a few of them to death, and to the rest he said: "If your desire of death be so irresistible, there are precipices enough from which to fling your-

selves. Begone!"

Evening Meditation

JESUS EMBRACED AFFLICTIONS FOR OUR SAKE.

I.

The Apostle, St. Paul, speaking of the Divine Beatitude, calls God the only happy, the only powerful One: *The blessed and only mighty* (1 Tim. vi. 15). And with reason, because all the happiness which can be enjoyed by us, His creatures, is nothing more than the smallest participation in the infinite happiness of God.

God in creating man at the beginning did not place him on earth to suffer, but put him in *the paradise of pleasure* (Gen. ii. 15). He put man in a place of delights in order that he might pass thence to Heaven where he should enjoy for all eternity the glory of the Blessed. But by sin unhappy man made himself unworthy of the earthly, and closed against himself the gates of the heavenly, Paradise, wilfully condemning himself to death and everlasting misery. But in order to rescue man from such a state of ruin, what did the Son of God do? From being blessed and happy as He was He chose to become afflicted and tormented. He made a choice on earth of a life of toil and ignominies. 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* (Lam. ii. 13). The life of Jesus Christ was bitter as the sea, which is thoroughly bitter and salt, and contains not one drop of sweet water. And therefore Isaias rightly calls Jesus Christ *a Man of sorrows* (Is. liii. 3), as though He had been capable on this earth of nothing but anguish and sorrow. St. Thomas says that the Redeemer did not simply take sorrow on Himself, but that "He endured sorrow in its highest degree"; whereby He would signify that He chose to be the most afflicted Man that had ever been upon earth, or should ever be hereafter.

He comes forth, then, from the prison of His Mother's womb, but for what? Is it perhaps to enjoy Himself? He comes forth to fresh suffering, for He chose to be born in the depth of Winter in a cavern where beasts find stabling, and at the hour of midnight. And He is born in such poverty that He has no fire to warm Him, nor clothes enough to screen Him from the cold. "A

grand pulpit is that manger," says St. Thomas of Villanova. Oh, how well does Jesus teach us the love of suffering in the grotto of Bethlehem!

II.

"In the stable," adds Salmeron, "all is vile to the sight, unpleasant to the hearing, offensive to the smell, hard and revolting to the touch." - Everything in the stable is painful: everything is painful to the sight, for one sees nothing but rugged and dark rocks; everything is painful to the hearing, for He hears only the cries of brute beasts; everything is painful to the smell, from the stench of the litter that is scattered around; and everything is painful to the touch, for His cradle is only a narrow manger, and His bed only a handful of straw. Look on this Infant God, how He lies bound up in swaddling clothes, so that He cannot stir. "God endures," said St. Zeno, "to be bound in swaddling-clothes, because He had come to pay the debts of the whole world." And hereupon St. Augustine remarks, "O Blessed rags, with which we wipe away the uncleanness of sins!" Observe Him how He trembles with cold; how He weeps, to let us know that He suffers, and offers to the Eternal Father those first tears to release us from that endless wailing which we had deserved! "Blessed tears," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "which blot out our iniquities!" O tears for us most blessed, since they obtain for us the pardon of our sins!

And thus did the life of Jesus Christ continue always in affliction and sorrow. But a short time after He was born He was obliged to fly as an exile into Egypt to escape death at the hands of Herod. Then, in that barbarous country He passed many years of His childhood poor and unknown. Nor was the life which He led on His return from Egypt, dwelling at Nazareth, very different up to the time when He suffered death at the hands of the executioners on the Cross in a sea of sorrows and infamy.

O Jesus, my Saviour, I praise Thee, I thank Thee and I love Thee. I love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself; I love Thee with all my soul and I give myself all to Thee. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my consolation, recommend me to thy Son.

Wednesday--Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

SAD STATE OF THE WORLDLING AT DEATH

What will be the feelings of the worldling when he is told that death is at hand? What pain will he feel in hearing these words: Your illness is mortal. It is necessary to receive the Last Sacraments, to unite yourself to God, to prepare to bid farewell to the world. What! exclaims the sick man, must I leave all? Yes, you must leave all! *Thou shalt die and not live!*

I.

Imagine yourself at the bedside of a negligent Christian who is overpowered by sickness, and has but a few hours to live. Behold him oppressed by pains, by swoons, by suffocation, want of breath and cold perspirations; his reason so impaired that he feels but little, understands little, and can speak but little. The greatest of all his miseries is, that though at the point of death, instead of thinking of his soul and of preparing accounts for eternity, he fixes all his thoughts on physicians, on the remedies by which he may be rescued from the sickness and the pains which will soon put an end to life. "They are unable to have any other thought than of themselves," says St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of the condition of negligent Christians at the hour of death. Surely his relatives and friends will admonish the dying Christian of his danger? No; there is not one among all his relatives and friends who has the courage to announce to him the news of death, and to advise him to receive the Last Sacraments. Through fear of offending him, they all refuse to inform him of his danger. O my God! from this moment I thank Thee, that at death I shall, through Thy grace, be assisted by my beloved brothers of my Congregation, who will then have no other interest than that of my eternal salvation, and will all help me to die well.

But though he is not admonished of his approaching end, the poor sick man, seeing the family in disorder, the medical consultations repeated, the remedies multiplied, and frequent and violent, is filled with confusion and terror. Assaulted by fears, remorse and distrust, he says within himself: Perhaps the

end of my days has arrived! But what will be his feelings when at last he is told that death is at hand? *Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die and shalt not live* (Is. xxxviii. 1). What pain will he feel in hearing these words: Your illness is mortal. It is necessary to receive the Last Sacraments, to unite yourself to God, and to prepare to bid farewell to this world. What! exclaims the sick man; must I take leave of all -- of my house, my villa, my relatives, friends, conversations, games and amusements? Yes, you must take leave of all. The lawyer is already come, and writes this last farewell: "I bequeath." And what does he take away with him? Nothing but a miserable rag, which will soon rot with him in the grave.

If it were at this moment announced to me, O Lord, that my death was at hand, such would be the painful sentiments that would torture my soul. I thank Thee for giving me this light, and for giving me time to enter into myself. O my God, I will no longer fly from Thee. Thou hast sought after me long enough. I have just reason to fear that Thou wilt abandon me, if I now refuse to give myself to Thee, and continue to resist Thy calls. Thou hast given me a heart to love Thee, and I have made so bad a use of it. I have loved creatures and have not loved Thee, my Creator and Redeemer Who hast given Thy life for the love of me. Instead of loving Thee, how often have I offended, how often have I despised Thee, and turned my back upon Thee? I knew that by such a sin I insulted Thee, and still I committed it. My Jesus, I am sorry for all my sins.

II.

Oh, with what melancholy and agitation will the dying man be seized at the sight of the tears of servants, at the silence of his friends, who have not courage to speak in his presence. But his greatest anguish will arise from the remorse of his conscience, which in that tempest will be rendered more terrible by the remembrance of the disorderly life he has until then led, in spite of so many calls and lights from God, of so many admonitions from Spiritual Fathers, and of so many resolutions, made, but never executed, or afterwards neglected. He will then say: O unhappy me! I have had so many lights from God, so much time to settle my conscience, and have not done so. Behold, I have

now arrived at the gate of death. What would it have cost me to have avoided such an occasion of sin, to have broken off such a friendship, to have frequented the Tribunal of Penance? Ah, so very little! But, though it should have cost me much pain and labour, I ought to have submitted to every inconvenience to save my soul, which is of more importance to me than all the goods of this world. Oh, if I had put into execution the good resolutions I made on such an occasion! If I had continued the good works which I began at such a time, how happy I should now feel! But these things I have not done, and now there is no more time to do them. The sentiments of dying sinners who have neglected the care of their souls during life, are like those of the damned who mourn in hell over their sins as the cause of their sufferings, but mourn without fruit and without remedy.

O my Jesus, I wish to change my life. I renounce all the pleasures of the world in order to love and please Thee, O God of my soul. Thou hast given me strong proofs of Thy love. I too would wish before death to give Thee some proofs of my love. From this moment I accept all the infirmities, crosses, insults, and offences which I shall receive from men. Give me strength to submit to them with peace. I wish to bear them all for the love of Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee above every good. Increase my love, give me holy perseverance. Mary my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

SENTIMENTS OF A LIVELY FAITH

O ye atheists who believe not in God, fools that you are! If you do not believe that there is a God, tell me who created you? How can you imagine that there are creatures existing, without a previous Power having created them? This world which you admire, governed as it is in so beautiful and constant an order, -- could chance, which has neither order nor mind, ever have made it?

Poor wretches! you try to persuade yourselves that the soul dies like the body; but, O God, what will you say, when in the next world you find that your souls are immortal, and that throughout eternity you will be unable to repair the ruin you have brought upon yourselves?

But if you believe that there is a God, you must also believe that there is a True Religion. And if you do not believe that the Religion of the Roman Catholic Church is the true one, tell me which is the true one? Perhaps that of the Pagans who admit many gods, and so destroy and deny all of them? Perhaps that of the Mahometans, which is a mixture of fables and follies and contradictions -- a religion invented by an infamous impostor, and framed rather for beasts than for men? Perhaps that of the Jews? They, indeed, had at one time the true Faith, but because they rejected their Redeemer Who taught the New Law of grace, they lost their Faith, their country, and all. Perhaps of those heretics who, separating themselves from our Church (which was founded by Jesus Christ, and to which He promised that it should never fail) have confused all revealed dogmas in such a way that the belief of each contradicts that of his neighbour.

Ah! it is most evident that our Faith is the only true one. Either there is Faith, and, then, there can be no other true Religion but ours; or, there is no true Faith, and then all religions are false. But this cannot be; for as there is a God, there must be a true Faith and a true Religion.

But what much greater fools are those Christians who hold the true Faith and live as if they did not believe it! They believe that there is a God, a just Judge, that there is a Paradise and an eternal hell; and yet they live as if there were no Judgment, no Heaven, no hell, no Eternity, no God!

O God, how can Christians believe in Jesus Christ, believe in a God born in a stable; a God living in obscurity in a shop for thirty years and working for His livelihood every day as a simple servant; in fine, how can they believe in a God nailed on a Cross, and dying, consumed with grief; and not only not love Him, but even make a mockery of Him by their sins!

O holy Faith, enlighten all those poor blind creatures who run to eternal perdition! But this light does ever shine forth and enlighten all men, both the faithful and unbelievers: *True light, which enlighteneth every man* (Jo. i. 9). How is it, then, that so many are lost? O cursed sin, thou dost blind the minds of so many poor souls, who open their eyes only when they enter eternity! But then they can no more remedy their error!

How is it, my Jesus, that so many of Thy servants have shut themselves up in caves and deserts, to attend only to their salvation; so many nobles and even princes have retired to the cloister, in order to live in poverty and unknown to the world, to make sure of their eternal salvation; so many Martyrs have left all; so many tender virgins have renounced marriage with the highest nobles of the earth, and have embraced such torments as the rack; have braved the axe, the coat of fiery mail, the red-hot gridirons, and the most cruel deaths, rather than lose Thy grace, while so many others live in sin and far from Thee for months and years!

I thank Thee, my Jesus, for the light Thou givest me, by which Thou makest me know that the goods of this world are but smoke, filth, vanity and deceit, and that Thou art the true and only Good.

My God, I thank Thee that Thou hast given me this Faith, and that Thou hast made it so clear to us by the fulfilment of Prophecies, by the truth of miracles, by the constancy of Martyrs, by the sanctity of the doctrine, and by the wonderful propagation of the same throughout the world; so that if it were not true, it would be impossible not to say that Thou hast deceived us, in proving it to us by the numerous testimonies that Thou hast given us of it.

I believe all that the Church teaches me to believe, because Thou hast revealed it. Nor do I pretend to comprehend intellectually those Mysteries which are above my mind; it is enough that Thou hast said so. I pray Thee to increase Thy Faith in me. *Adauge nobis fidem!* (Luke xvii. 5).

Evening Meditation

THE INGRATITUDE OF MEN MADE JESUS SUFFER MOST.

I.

We must also well understand here that the pains which Jesus Christ endured in His Passion, in the scourging and the crowning with thorns, in the Crucifixion, His agony and death, and in all the other torments and ignominies which He suffered at the end of His life, He also suffered from the beginning. From the beginning of His life He had always before His eyes the sad

vision of all the torments He would have to suffer when about to leave this earth, as He predicted by the mouth of David: *My sorrow is continually before me* (Ps. xxxvii. 18). We hide from the sick man the knife or the fire with which he is to be cut or cauterized in order to regain his health; but Jesus would not have the Instruments of His Passion, by which He was to lose His life that He might gain for us eternal life, hidden from His sight. He desired always to have before His eyes the scourge, the thorns, the nails, the Cross, which were to drain all the Blood from His veins, till He died of pure grief, deprived of all consolation.

One day Jesus Christ crucified appeared to Sister Magdalen Orisini who had been suffering a heavy affliction for a long time, to comfort her by the remembrance of His Passion, and to animate her to bear her cross with patience. She said to Him: "But Thou, my Lord, wast only Three Hours on the Cross, while I have suffered this pain for many years." Then our Lord from the Cross replied: "Ignorant creature that thou art! from the first moment that I was in the womb of Mary I suffered all that I had afterwards to suffer in my death." "Christ," says Novarinus, "even in the womb of His Mother, had the impression of the Cross on His mind; so that no sooner was He born than He might be said to have the *principality on his shoulders* (Is. ix. 6)." So, then, my Redeemer, throughout Thy whole life I shall find Thee nowhere but on the Cross. Lord, I find Thee nowhere but on the Cross! Yes, for the Cross on which Jesus Christ died was ever in His mind to torment Him. Even while sleeping, says Bellarmine, the sight of the Cross was present to the Heart of Jesus: "Christ had His Cross always before His eyes. When He slept, His Heart watched; nor was it ever free from the vision of the Cross."

II.

It was, however, not so much the sorrows of His Passion that saddened and embittered the life of our Redeemer, as the sight of all the sins men would commit after His death. These were the cruel executioners which made Him live in continual agony, oppressed by such an overwhelming grief that it alone would have been enough to make Him die of pure sorrow. Father Lessius says that the sight alone of the ingratitude of mankind would have been sufficient to make Jesus Christ die of grief a thousand

times.

The scourges, the Cross, death itself, were not hateful objects to Him, but most dear, chosen and desired by Himself. He had offered Himself spontaneously to suffer them: *He was offered because it was his own will* (Is. liii. 7). He did not give His life against His will, but by His own election, as He tells us by St. John: *I lay down my life for my sheep* (Jo. x. 15). This was indeed the chief desire of His whole life, that the time of His Passion should arrive, so that the Redemption of mankind might be completed. For this reason He said on the night preceding His death: *With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer* (Luke xxii. 15). And before this time arrived He seemed to console Himself by saying, *I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!* (Luke xii. 50). I must be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood, not indeed to wash My own soul, but those of my sheep, from the stains of their sin; and how ardently do I desire the arrival of the hour when I shall be bleeding and dead on the Cross! St. Ambrose says that the Redeemer was not affected "by the fear of death, but by the delay of our Redemption." St. Zeno tells us Jesus Christ chose for Himself the trade of a carpenter in this world: *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?* (Mark vi. 3), because as carpenters are always handling wood and nails, it would seem that Jesus exercising this trade took pleasure in such things, seeing that they represented to Him better than anything else the Nails and the Cross by which He willed to suffer.

Thus we see it was not so much the thought of His Passion that afflicted the Heart of our Redeemer, as the ingratitude with which mankind would repay His love. It was this ingratitude which made Him weep in the Stable of Bethlehem; which caused Him to sweat Blood in His deadly agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; which filled Him with such sorrow that He says even that it alone was sufficient to make Him die: *My soul is sorrowful even to death* (Matt. xxvi. 38), and, finally, this ingratitude it was which caused Him to die in desolation on the Cross.

Thursday--Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"THE DESIRE OF THE WICKED SHALL PERISH."

How ardently shall we desire at death the time we have squandered away! This being true, our folly and misfortune will be all the greater, if after knowing these things during life, we neglect to apply a remedy in time.

I.

Oh, how clearly are the Truths of Faith seen at the hour of death! But then they only serve to increase the anguish of the dying Christian who has led a bad life, particularly if he has been consecrated to God, and has had greater facilities for serving Him, more time for exercises of piety, more good example and more inspirations. O God, what torture will he feel in thinking: *I have admonished others, and my life has been worse than theirs! I have left the world, and yet have cherished attachment to worldly pleasures and vanities!* What remorse will he feel in thinking that with the lights he had received from God a very pagan would become a Saint! With what pain will his soul be racked when he remembers that he ridiculed in others certain practices of piety, as if they were weaknesses of mind; and that he praised certain worldly maxims of self-esteem, or of self-love, such as: We should seek our own advancement; We ought to avoid suffering, and indulge in the amusements within our reach.

The desire of the wicked shall perish (Ps. cxi. 10). How ardently shall we desire at death the time we now squander away! In his *Dialogues*, St. Gregory relates that a certain rich man called Crisorius who had led a wicked life, seeing at death the devils come to carry him off, exclaimed: Give me time! Give me time until tomorrow! They replied: O fool! Do you now ask for time? You have had so much time, but you wasted it and spent it in committing sin! And now you seek for time! Time is now no more! The unhappy man continued to cry out and call for assistance. To his son Maximus, a monk, who was present, he said: O my son, assist me! O Maximus, come to my aid! With his face all on fire he flung himself furiously from side to side in his bed, and in that state of agitation and screaming aloud, like one

in despair, he breathed forth his unhappy soul.

O my God, I will no longer abuse Thy mercy. I thank Thee for the light Thou now givest me, and I promise to change my life. I see that Thou canst not bear with me any longer. I will not wait till Thou send me to hell or abandon me to a wicked life, which would be a greater punishment than death itself. Behold, I cast myself at Thy feet; receive me into Thy favour. I do not deserve Thy grace; but Thou hast said: *The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in whatsoever day he shall turn from his wickedness* (Ezech. xxxiii. 12). If, then, O my Jesus, I have hitherto offended Thy infinite goodness, I now repent with my whole heart and hope for pardon. I will say with St. Anselm: Ah, since Thou hast redeemed me by Thy Blood, do not permit me to be lost on account of my sins. Look not on my ingratitude, but have regard to the love which made Thee die for me. If I have lost Thy grace, Thou hast not lost the power of restoring it to me.

II.

Alas! during life, these fools love their folly; but at death they open their eyes, and confess that they have been fools. But this only serves to increase their fear of repairing past evils; and dying in this state, they leave their salvation very uncertain. You who are now reading this -- I imagine that you say: This is indeed true. But if this is true, then your folly and misfortune will be still greater, if after knowing these truths during life, you neglect to apply a remedy in time. This very point which you have read will be at death a sword of sorrow for you.

Since, therefore, you now have time to avoid a death so full of terror, begin instantly to repair the past. Do not wait for the time in which you can make little preparation for Judgment. Do not wait for another month, nor for another week. Perhaps this light which God in His mercy gives you now may be the last light and the last call for you. It is folly to be unwilling to think of death, which is certain, and on which eternity depends; but it would be still greater folly to reflect on it, and not prepare for Judgment. Make now the reflections and resolutions which you would then make. They may be made now with profit -- then without fruit: now with confidence that you will save your soul -- then, with diffidence of your salvation. A gentleman who was

about to take leave of the court of Charles the Fifth, to live only for God, was asked by the emperor why he thought of quitting the court. The gentleman answered: To secure salvation it is necessary that some time in penitential works should intervene between a disorderly life and a happy death.

Have mercy on me, then, O my Redeemer. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee, for I purpose henceforth to love nothing but Thee. Among so many possible creatures Thou hast chosen me to love Thee. I make choice of Thee, O Sovereign Good, to love Thee above every good. Thou goest before me with Thy Cross; I am willing to follow Thee with the cross Thou wilt give me to carry. I embrace every mortification and every pain which shall come from Thee. Do not deprive me of Thy grace and I am content. Mary, my hope, obtain for me from God perseverance and the grace to love Him, and I ask for nothing more.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

1. ST. GORDIUS, CENTURION (January 3).

St. Gordius who was born in the Third Century, followed the military profession, and obtained the rank of centurion, or captain. St. Basil the Great, who wrote a homily in praise of this Saint, relates that at the time of his Martyrdom there was a great persecution of the Christians at Caesarea. In the public squares idols of wood and stone were exposed, and those who refused to sacrifice to them were tortured and put to death. The consternation of the faithful was very great, for their houses were, with impunity, sacked by the idolaters, the prisons filled with Christians, and while the churches were deserted, the woods and mountains were peopled with the fugitives.

Hereupon St. Gordius renounced his profession, laid aside the military insignia, and retired to the desert to unite himself to God by holy prayer and penitential practices. He casually heard that on a certain day public games were about to be celebrated at Caesarea in honour of Mars. He accordingly proceeded to the city, and beheld there a great concourse, not only of Gentiles, but of Christians, who, weak in Faith, were not ashamed to assist in these diabolical festivities. The Saint, inspired by the Holy

Ghost, proceeded to glorify the Christian Religion, and to reprobate that of the pagans who adored and sacrificed to false gods.

The Gentiles, at this interruption of the games, shouted that the Saint should be put to death for his temerity. They seized upon him, therefore, and led him to the governor, accusing him of all that he had said. The governor, knowing that he had retired to the mountains, asked him why he had fled and afterwards returned. St. Gordius replied: "I have returned, because I am anxious to die for Jesus Christ; and knowing thee to be the most cruel of men, I thought that this afforded me the best opportunity of satisfying my desire."

The tyrant hearing him speak thus, ordered the executioners to prepare their tortures. The Saint, nothing daunted, fervently offered himself to Jesus Christ, and implored strength to suffer for His sake. Scourges, the rack, and fire were used to shake the constancy of the holy Martyr, but he said: "Torture me as much as thou pleasest; the more excruciating my agony the greater my reward in Heaven; for the wounds which now cover my body, I shall there be covered with a garment of glory; and by the pains which now afflict me, I shall earn everlasting joy.

The governor, perceiving that he could not conquer him by these cruel tortures, endeavoured to gain him over by promises of riches and honours; but the Saint answered: Thou art deceived if thou thinkest that I will barter the joys of Heaven for the miserable advantages this world can afford." Finally, the judge perceiving that promises were as ineffectual as threats, pronounced upon him the sentence of death.

While the Saint was proceeding to the place of execution, his friends exhorted him to yield, for the present, to the wishes of the governor, and not perish thus miserably in his youth. The Saint replied "Weep not for me but for those who persecute the faithful, since for them eternal fire is prepared; for my part, I am prepared to die, not once, but a thousand times, for Jesus Christ." They urged that, to avoid death, he might deny Jesus Christ with his tongue though he continued to adore Him in his heart. The Saint said: "Far be it from me to deny my God with that tongue which He Himself hath given me."

He then armed himself with the Sign of the Cross and went

boldly to encounter death which, according to St. Basil, was that by fire, in which he gloriously consummated his Martyrdom.

Evening Meditation

CARRYING OUR CROSS FOR CHRIST WILL MAKE UP FOR ALL.

By our sins we also contributed to embitter with affliction the whole life of our Saviour. But let us thank His goodness in giving us time to remedy the evil which has been done.

How, then, are we to remedy it? By bearing patiently all the crosses which He sends us for our good. And He Himself tells us how we can bear these troubles with patience: *Put me as a seal upon thy heart* (Cant. viii. 6). Put upon thy heart the image of Christ crucified. That is to say: Consider My example and the pains which I have suffered for thee; and so shalt thou bear all crosses in peace. St. Augustine says that this heavenly Physician made Himself weak, that He might heal our weakness by His own infirmity. "Wondrous medicine! The Physician deigns to become sick, to heal His patient by His own infirmity," according to that which Isaiah spoke: *By his bruises we are healed* (Is. liii. 5). To heal our souls, which are weakened by sin, the medicine of suffering is the one necessary remedy, and Jesus Christ desired to be the first to taste it, that we who are the true sinners should not refuse to take it also: "The Physician drinks first, that the sick man also may not hesitate to drink."

Believing this, says St. Epiphanius, as true followers of Jesus Christ, we ought to thank Him when He sends us crosses: "It is a virtue peculiar to a Christian to give thanks when in adversity." And this is reasonable, because by sending us crosses He makes us like to Himself. St. John Chrysostom makes an observation which is very consoling. He says that when we thank God for His benefits, we do but give Him that which we owe Him; but that when we suffer some pain with patience for His love, then God in a certain way becomes our debtor: "If you thank God for good things you pay a debt; if you thank Him for evil things, you make Him your debtor."

II.

If thou wouldst render love to Jesus Christ, says St. Bernard, learn from Him how thou must love Him: "Learn from Christ

how to love Christ." Be happy to suffer something for that God Who has suffered so much for thee. The desire of pleasing Jesus Christ, and of making known to Him the love they bore Him, was that which rendered 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), said St. Paul. St. Teresa used to say: "Either to suffer or to die!" And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi: "To suffer and not to die!" And the Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, a Sicilian nun, was so enamoured of suffering that she went so far as to say: "Truly Paradise is beautiful, but one thing is wanting -- *there is no suffering there.*"

If we have not the generosity to desire and seek for sufferings, let us at least try to accept with patience those tribulations which God sends us for our good.

And when God sends us crosses, not only let us be resigned, but let us also thank Him, since it is a sign that He means to pardon our sins, and save us from hell which we have deserved. He who has offended God must be punished, and therefore we ought always to beg of Him to chastise us in this world, and not in the next. That sinner is to be pitied who does not receive his chastisement in this life, but, on the contrary, is prosperous. May God preserve us from that mercy of which Isaias speaks: *Let us have pity on the wicked* (Is. xxvi. 10). "I do not want this mercy," says St. Bernard; "such pity is worse than any anger." O Lord, I do not desire this kind of mercy, for it is more terrible than any chastisement. When God does not punish a sinner in this life, it is a sign that He waits to punish him in eternity, where the punishment will have no end.

From the price thy Redeemer had to pay learn the value of His gifts and the gravity of sin, says St. Laurence Justinian. When we see a God dead on the Cross, we ought to consider the great gift He has made us in giving us His Blood to redeem us from hell, and at the same time to understand the malice of sin, which made the death of a God necessary to obtain pardon for us. O Eternal God, nothing terrifies me more than to see Thy Son punished by so cruel a death on account of sin!

Friday--Third Week after Epiphany

(For First Friday of February)

Morning Meditation

"MY SOUL IS SORROWFUL UNTO DEATH."

The grief of the Heart of Jesus came, not on account of the torments He saw He should have to suffer, but from seeing the sins men would commit after His death. It was the sight of my sins that oppressed Thy Heart, O Jesus, and made Thee agonize and sweat Blood. This is the recompense I have made Thee!

I.

My soul is sorrowful even unto death (Matt. xxvi. 38). These were the words that proceeded from the sorrowful Heart of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemani before He went to die. Alas, whence came this extreme grief of His, which was so great that it was enough to take away His life? Perhaps it was on account of the torments that He saw He would have to suffer? No, for He had foreseen these torments from the time of His Incarnation. He had foreseen them, and had accepted them of His own free will: *He was offered because it was his own will* (Is. liii. 7). His grief came from seeing the sins men would commit after His death. It was then, according to St. Bernardine of Sienna, that He saw clearly each particular sin of each one of us. He had regard to every individual sin.

It was not, then, my Jesus, the sight of the scourges, of the thorns, and of the Cross which so afflicted Thee in the Garden of Gethsemani, -- it was the sight of my sins! Each one of them so oppressed Thy Heart with grief and sadness that it made Thee agonize and sweat Blood. This is the recompense I have made Thee for the love Thou hast shown me by dying for me. Ah, let me share the grief Thou didst feel in the Garden for my sins, so that the remembrance of it may make me sorrowful all my life. Ah, my sweet Redeemer, if I could but console Thee as much now by my grief and love as I then afflicted Thee! I repent, my Love, with all my heart for having preferred my own miserable satisfaction to Thee. I am sorry and I love Thee above all things. Although I have despised Thee, yet I hear Thee ask for my love. Thou wouldst have me love Thee with all my heart: *Love the Lord*

thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul (Matt. xxii. 37). Yes, my God, I love Thee with all my heart, I love Thee with all my soul. Do Thou give me the love Thou requirest of me. If I have hitherto sought myself, I will now seek none but Thee. And seeing that Thou hast loved me more than others, more than others will I love Thee. Draw me always more and more, my Jesus, to Thy love by the odour of Thine ointments, which are the loving attractions of Thy grace. Finally, give me strength to correspond to so much love which God has borne to an ungrateful worm and traitor. Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me by thy prayers.

II.

Neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. ix. 12).

And of what worth would the blood of all goats or even of all men be, if they were sacrificed to obtain Divine grace for us? It is only the Blood of this Man-God would merit for us pardon and eternal salvation. But if God Himself had not devised this way to redeem us, as He did by dying to save us, who ever would have been able to think of it? His love alone designed it and executed it. Therefore holy Job did well to cry out to this God Who loves man so much: *What is man that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?* (Job vii. 17). Ah, my Jesus, one heart is but little with which to love Thee. If I loved Thee even with the hearts of all men, it would be too little. What ingratitude, then, would it be if I were to divide my heart between Thee and creatures! No, my Love, Thou wouldst have it all, and well dost Thou deserve it; I will give it all to Thee. If I do not know how to give it Thee as I ought, take it Thyself, and grant that I may be able to say to Thee with truth: *Thou art the God of my heart* (Ps. lxxii. 26). Ah, my Redeemer, by the merits of the abject and afflicted life that Thou didst will to live for me, give me true humility which will make me love contempt and an obscure life. May I lovingly embrace all infirmities, affronts, persecutions and interior sufferings, and all the crosses which may come to me from Thy hands. Let me love Thee, and then dispose of me as Thou wilt. O loving Heart of my Jesus, make me love Thee by discovering to me the immense Good that Thou art. Make me

all Thine before I die. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who art worthy to be loved. I love Thee with all my heart; I love Thee with all my soul.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

2. ST. ARCADIUS (January 12).

St. Arcadius was a native of Africa, and most probably suffered Martyrdom in Caesarea (at present Charchell, a small village in the province of Mascara, in Algiers), the capital of Mauritania. A furious persecution was raging -- during which the Christians were cruelly dragged before the idols to sacrifice. Arcadius withdrew to a solitary place, where he employed his time in fasting and prayer. Meanwhile as he did not appear at the public sacrifices, soldiers were despatched to surprise him in his house, but not finding him, they arrested one of his relatives in order to make him discover the retreat of his kinsman.

Arcadius was unwilling that another should suffer on his account, and presented himself to the governor, saying that his relative might be discharged, as he had come to answer for himself. The governor replied that he also might depart unhurt if he would sacrifice to the gods. The Saint courageously answered: "Thou art deceived if thou believest that threats of death can affright the servants of God. They say with St. Paul: *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Philipp i. 21). Invent therefore, what tortures thou canst, we shall never be separated from our God."

Hereupon the tyrant, full of wrath, and thinking the usual tortures too light for Arcadius, ordered that joint after joint should be chopped off the Saint's body, beginning with his toes. The barbarous butchery was instantly executed, during which the holy Martyr ceased not to bless the Lord. After his body had been reduced to a mere trunk, calmly surveying his mangled limbs scattered around him, he exclaimed: "Oh, happy members that have served to manifest the glory of God! Now that I behold you separated from my body, you are dearer to me than ever. I now know that I belong to Jesus Christ, as I have always desired."

Then turning to those present who were idolaters, he said: "Know ye that all these sufferings are easily overcome by those

who continually keep before their eyes eternal life which God bestows upon His servants. Adore the true God, Who consoles me in these tortures; and abandon the worship of your false gods who cannot assist you in your need. He who dies for the true God acquires life everlasting. Behold, for having suffered these torments, I go to live with Him eternally, without fear of ever losing Him." Having finished his discourse, he placidly gave his soul to his Redeemer, on the 12th of January.

This Martyrdom filled the idolaters with confusion, and inspired the Christians with a great desire of laying down their lives for Jesus Christ. They afterwards collected the scattered limbs of the Martyr and gave them honourable burial.

Evening Meditation

THE GOODNESS AND KINDNESS OF GOD, OUR SAVIOUR

I.

The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared (Tit. iii. 4).

God has loved man from all eternity: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* (Jer. xxxi. 3). St. Bernard says that before the Incarnation of the Word the Divine Power appeared in creating the world, and the Divine Wisdom in governing it, but when the Son of God became Man, then was made manifest the Love which God had for men. And, in fact, after seeing Jesus Christ accept so afflicted a life and so painful a death, we would be offering Him an insult if we doubted the great love which He bears us. Yes, He does surely love us, and because He loves us, He wishes to be loved by us. *And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again* (2 Cor. v. 15).

Ah, my Saviour, when shall I begin to understand the love Thou hast had for me? Hitherto instead of loving Thee, I have repaid Thee with offences and contempt of Thy graces, but since Thou art infinite in goodness I will not lose confidence. Thou hast promised to pardon him who repents; for Thy mercy's sake fulfil Thy promise to me. I have dishonoured Thee by putting Thee aside to follow my own pleasures; but now I grieve for it from the bottom of my soul, and there is no sorrow that afflicts

me more than the remembrance of having offended Thee, my Sovereign Good. Pardon me and unite me entirely to Thee by an eternal bond of love, that I may not leave Thee any more, and that I may live only to love Thee and to obey Thee. Yes, my Jesus, for Thee alone will I live, Thee only will I love. Once I left Thee for creatures, now I leave all to give myself wholly to Thee. I love Thee, O God of my soul, I love Thee more than myself. O Mary, Mother of God, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to God till death.

II.

By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live by him (1 John iv. 9).

All men were dead by sin, and they would have remained dead if the Eternal Father had not sent His Son to restore them to life by His death. But how? What is this? A God to die for man! A God! And who is this man? "Quid sum ego?" asks St. Bonaventure. "What am I? O Lord, and why hast Thou loved me so much?" But it is in this that the infinite love of God shines forth. *By this hath the charity of God appeared.* The Holy Church exclaims on Holy Saturday, "O wonderful condescension of Thy mercy toward us! O inestimable affection of charity! That Thou mightest redeem a slave, Thou didst deliver up Thy Son!" O immense compassion! O prodigy! O excess of the love of God! To deliver a servant and a sinner from the death that he deserves, God's innocent Son is condemned to die!

Thou, then, O my God, hast done this that we might live by Jesus Christ: *that we might live by him.* Yes, indeed, it is but meet that we should live for Him, Who has given all His Blood and His life for us. My dear Redeemer, in the presence of Thy Wounds and of the Cross on which I see Thee dead for me, I consecrate to Thee my life and my whole will. Ah, make me all Thine, for from this day forward I seek and desire none but Thee. I love Thee, infinite Goodness; I love Thee, infinite Love. While I live may I always repeat, *My God, I love Thee! I love Thee!* Let my last words in death be: *My God, I love Thee! I love Thee!*

Saturday--Third Week after Epiphany

(Feast of the Purification and Presentation, Feb. 2)

Morning Meditation

"AND THY OWN SOUL A SWORD SHALL PIERCE."

Mary already knew all the torments that her Son was to endure, but in the words addressed to her by Simeon, *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*, all the minute circumstances of the sufferings, internal and external, that were to torment Jesus in His Passion, were made known to her. Mary consented, saying: Eternal Father, since Thou willest that it should be so, *not my will, but Thine be done!*

I.

Already the most Blessed Virgin was enlightened by the Sacred Scriptures, and knew the sufferings that the Redeemer was to endure in His life, and still more at the time of His death. But in the words of Simeon, *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*, all the minute circumstances of the sufferings, internal and external, that were to torment her Jesus in His Passion, were made known to her, as our Lord revealed to St. Teresa. She consented to all with a constancy which filled even the Angels with astonishment; she pronounced the sentence that her Son should die, and die by so ignominious and painful a death, saying: "Eternal Father, since Thou willest that it should be so, *not my will, but thine be done* (Luke, xxii. 42). I unite my will to Thy most holy will, and I sacrifice this, my Son to Thee. I am satisfied that He should lose His life for Thy glory and the salvation of the world. At the same time I sacrifice my heart to Thee, that it may be transpierced with sorrow, and this as much as Thou pleassest: it suffices me, my God, that Thou art glorified and satisfied with my offering: *Not my will, but Thine be done!* O charity without measure! O constancy without parallel! O victory which deserves the eternal admiration of Heaven and earth!

Hence it was that Mary was silent during the Passion of Jesus, when He was unjustly accused. She said not a word to Pilate who was somewhat inclined to set her Son at liberty, knowing, as he did, His innocence. She only appeared in public to assist at the great Sacrifice, which was to be accomplished on Calvary; she accompanied her beloved Son to the place of execution; she was with Him from the first moment, when He was nailed on the Cross: *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother* (Jo. xix. 25),

until she saw Him expire, and the Sacrifice was consummated. And all this she did to complete the offering which she had made of Him to God in the Temple.

O holy Mother of God, and my Mother Mary, thou wast so deeply interested in my salvation as to offer to death the dearest object of thy heart, thy beloved Jesus! Since, then, thou didst so much desire to see me saved, it is right that, after God, I should place all my hopes in thee. O yes, most Blessed Virgin, I do, indeed, entirely confide in thee. Ah, by the merits of the great sacrifice which thou didst offer this day to God, the sacrifice of the life of thy Son, entreat Him to have pity on my poor soul for which this Immaculate Lamb did not refuse to die on the Cross.

II.

To understand the violence Mary had to offer herself in this Sacrifice it would be necessary to understand the love that this Mother bore to Jesus. Generally speaking, the love of mothers is so tender towards their children, that, when these are at the point of death, and there is fear of losing them, it causes them to forget all their faults and defects, and even the injuries that they may have received from them, and makes them suffer an inexpressible grief. And yet the love of these mothers is a love divided amongst other children, or at least amongst other creatures. Mary had an only Son, and He was the most beautiful of all the sons of Adam -- most amiable, for He had everything to make Him so: He was obedient, virtuous, innocent, holy; suffice it to say, He was God! Again, this Mother's love was not divided amongst other objects; she had concentrated all her love in this only Son; nor did she fear to exceed in loving Him; for this Son was God Who merits infinite love. And this Son was the Victim that she of her own free-will had to sacrifice to death!

Let each one, then, consider how much it must have cost Mary, and what strength of mind she had to exercise in this act, by which she sacrificed the life of so amiable a Son to the Cross. Behold, therefore, the most fortunate of mothers, because the Mother of a God, but who was at the same time, of all mothers, the most worthy of compassion, being the most afflicted, inasmuch as she saw her Son destined to die on the Cross from the day on which He was given to her. What mother would accept

of a child, knowing that she would afterwards miserably lose him by an ignominious death, and that moreover she herself would be present and see him thus die? Mary willingly accepts this Son on so hard a condition; and not only does she accept Him, but she herself on this day offers Him with her own hand to death, sacrificing Him to divine Justice.

I desire, O my Queen, to offer my poor heart to God on this day, in imitation of thee; but I fear that seeing it so sordid and loathsome, He may refuse it. But if thou offerest it to Him, He will not reject it. He is always pleased with and accepts the offerings presented to Him by thy most pure hands. To thee, then, O Mary, do I this day present myself, miserable as I am; to Thee do I give myself without reserve. Do thou offer me as thy servant, together with Jesus to the Eternal Father, and beseech Him, by the merits of thy Son and for thy sake, to accept me and take me as His own. Ah, my sweetest Mother, for the love of thy sacrificed Son, help me always and at all times, and abandon me not. Never permit me to lose by my sins this most amiable Redeemer, Whom on this day thou didst offer with bitter grief to the cruel death of the Cross. Remind Him that I am thy servant, that in thee I have placed all my hope; say, in fine, that thou willest my salvation, and He will graciously hear thee.

Spiritual Reading

THE PURIFICATION OF MARY

THE GREAT SACRIFICE WHICH MARY MADE ON THIS DAY TO GOD IN OFFERING HIM THE LIFE OF HER SON

In the Old Law there were two precepts concerning the birth of first-born son. One was, that the mother should remain as unclean, retired in her house for forty days; after which she was to go to purify herself in the Temple. The other was, that the parents of the firstborn son should take him to the Temple, and there offer him to God. On this day the most Blessed Virgin obeyed both these precepts. Although Mary was not bound by the law of Purification, since she was always a virgin and always pure, yet her humility and obedience made her wish to go like other mothers to purify herself. She at the same time obeyed the second precept, to present and offer her Son to the Eternal

Father. *And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* (Luke ii. 22). But the Blessed Virgin did not offer Him as other mothers offered their sons. Others, indeed, offered them to God; but they knew that this oblation was simply a legal ceremony, and that by redeeming them they made them their own, without fear of having again to offer them to death. Mary really offered her Son to death, and knew for certain that the sacrifice of the life of Jesus which she then made was one day to be actually consummated on the Altar of the Cross; so that Mary, by offering the life of her Son, came, in consequence of the love she bore this Son, really to sacrifice her own entire self to God.

The Eternal Father had already determined to save man who was lost by sin, and to deliver him from eternal death. But because He willed at the same time that His Divine justice should not be defrauded of a due and worthy satisfaction, He spared not the life of His Son already become Man to redeem man, but willed that He should pay with the utmost rigour the penalty which men had deserved. *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all* (Rom. viii. 32). He sent Him, therefore, on earth to become Man. He destined Him a Mother and willed that this Mother should be the Blessed Virgin Mary. But as He willed not that His Divine Word should become her Son before she by an express consent had accepted Him, so also He willed not that Jesus should sacrifice His life for the salvation of men without the concurrent assent of Mary; that, together with the sacrifice of the life of the Son, the Mother's heart might also be sacrificed. St. Thomas teaches that the quality of mother gives her a special right over her children; hence, Jesus being in Himself innocent and undeserving of punishment, it seemed fitting that He should not be condemned to the Cross as a Victim for the sins of the world without the consent of His Mother, by which she should willingly offer Him to death.

But although from the moment she became the Mother of Jesus, Mary consented to His death, yet God willed that on this day she should make a solemn sacrifice of herself by offering her Son to Him in the Temple, sacrificing His precious life to Divine justice. Hence St. Epiphanius calls her "a priest." And now we

begin to see how much this sacrifice cost her, and what heroic virtues she had to practise when she herself subscribed to the sentence by which her beloved Jesus was condemned to death.

Behold Mary is actually on her road to Jerusalem to offer her Son; she hastens her steps towards the place of sacrifice and she herself bears the beloved Victim in her arms. She enters the Temple, approaches the altar, and there, beaming with modesty, devotion, and humility, presents her Son to the Most High. In the meantime the holy Simeon who had received a promise from God that he should not die without having first seen the expected Messiah, takes the Divine Child from the arms of the Blessed Virgin, and, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, announces to her how much the sacrifice she then made of her Son would cost her, and that with Him her own blessed soul would also be sacrificed.

Here St. Thomas of Villanova contemplates the holy old man becoming troubled and silent at the thought of having to give utterance to a Prophecy so fatal to this poor Mother. The Saint then looks on Mary who asks him: "Why, O Simeon, art thou thus troubled in the midst of such great consolations?" "O royal Virgin," he replies, "I would desire not to announce thee tidings so bitter; but since God thus wills it for thy greater merit, listen to what I have to say. This Child, Who is now such a source of joy to thee -- and, O God, with how much reason! -- this Child, I say, will one day be a source of such bitter grief to thee as no creature in the world has ever experienced. And this will be when thou seest Him persecuted by men of every class, and made a butt upon earth for their scoffs and outrages; they will even go so far as to put Him to death as a malefactor before thine own eyes! Thou so greatly rejoicest in this Infant; but, behold, He is placed for a sign that shall be contradicted. Know that after His death there will be many Martyrs, who for the love of this Son of thine will be tormented and put to death; their Martyrdom, however, will be endured in their bodies; but thine, O Divine Mother, will be endured in thy heart. O, how many thousands of men will be torn to pieces and put to death for the love of this Child! And although they will all suffer much in their bodies, thou, O Virgin, wilt suffer much more in thy heart."

Yes, in her heart; for compassion for the sufferings of this

most beloved Son was alone the sword of sorrow which was to pierce the heart of the Mother, as St. Simeon exactly foretold: *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke ii. 35). Already the most blessed Virgin, as St. Jerome says, was enlightened by the Sacred Scriptures, and knew the suffering that the Redeemer was to endure in His life, and still more at the time of His death. She fully understood from the Prophets that He was to be betrayed by one of His disciples: *For even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, hath greatly supplanted me* (Ps. xl. 10), as David foretold: that He was to be abandoned by them: *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered* (Zach. xiii. 7). She well knew the contempt, the spitting, the blows, the derisions that He was to suffer from the people: *I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them: I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and that spit upon me* (Is. 1. 6). She knew that He was to become the reproach of men, and the outcast and the most degraded of the people, so as to be saturated with insults and injuries: *But I am a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people* (Ps. xxi. 7). *He shall be filled with reproaches* (Lam. iii. 30). She knew that at the end of His life His most sacred flesh would be torn and mangled by scourges: *But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins* (Is. liii. 5). And this to such a degree that His whole body was to be disfigured, and become like that of a leper -- all wounds and the bones appearing. *There is no beauty in him nor comeliness ... and we have thought him, as it were, a leper* (Is. liii. 2). *They have numbered all my bones* (Ps. xxi. 18). She knew that He was to be pierced by nails: *They have dug my hands and feet* (Ps. xxi. 17). To be ranked with malefactors: *And was reputed with the wicked* (Is. liii. 12). And that finally, hanging on a Cross, He was to die for the salvation of men: *And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced* (Zach. xii. 10).

Evening Meditation

MARY'S GENEROSITY IN OFFERING JESUS TO DEATH FOR US

I.

St. Bonaventure says that the Blessed Virgin would have accepted the pains and death of her Son far more willingly for

herself; but to obey God she made the great offering of the Divine life of her Beloved Jesus, conquering, but with an excess of grief, the tender love which she bore Him. Hence it is that in this offering Mary had to do herself more violence and showed herself more generous than if she had offered herself to suffer all that her Son was to endure. Therefore she surpassed all the Martyrs in generosity; for the Martyrs offered their own lives, but the Blessed Virgin offered the life of her Son Whom she loved and esteemed infinitely more than her own life. Nor did the sufferings of this painful offering end here; nay, rather they only began; for from that time forward, during the whole life of her Son, Mary had constantly before her eyes the death and all the torments that He was to endure. Hence, the more this Son showed Himself beautiful, gracious, and amiable, the more did the anguish of her heart increase.

Ah, most sorrowful Mother, hadst thou loved thy Son less, or had He been less amiable, or had He loved thee less, thy sufferings in offering him to death would certainly have been diminished. But there never was, and never will be, a mother who loved her son more than thou didst love thine; for there never was, and never will be a son more amiable, or one who loved his mother more than thy Jesus loved thee. O God, had we beheld the beauty, the majesty of the countenance of that Divine Child, could we have ever had the courage to sacrifice His life for our own salvation? And thou, O Mary, who wast His Mother, and a Mother loving Him with so tender a love, thou couldst offer thy innocent Son for the salvation of men, to a death more painful and cruel than ever was endured by the greatest malefactor on earth!

II.

Ah, how sad a scene from that day forward must love have continually placed before the eyes of Mary, -- a scene representing all the outrages and mockeries which her poor Son was to endure! See, love already represents Him agonized with sorrow in the Garden, mangled with scourges, crowned with thorns in the Pretorium, and finally hanging on the ignominious Cross on Calvary! "Behold, O Mother," says love, "what an amiable and innocent Son thou offerest to so many torments and to so horri-

ble a death!" And to what purpose save Him from the hands of Herod, since it is only to reserve Him for a far more sorrowful end?

Thus Mary not only offered her Son to death in the Temple, but she renewed that offering every moment of her life; for she revealed to St. Bridget "that the sorrow announced to her by the holy Simeon never left her heart until her Assumption into Heaven." Hence St. Anselm thus addresses her: "O compassionate Lady, I cannot believe that thou couldst have endured for a moment so excruciating a torment without expiring under it, had not God Himself, the Spirit of Life, sustained thee.

If the sacrifice of Abraham by which he offered his son Isaac to God was so pleasing to the Divine Majesty, that as a reward He promised to multiply his descendants as the stars of Heaven -- *Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for my sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven* (Gen. xxii. 16,17) -- we must certainly believe that the more noble sacrifice which Mary made to God of her Jesus, was far more agreeable to Him, and therefore that He has granted that through her prayers the number of the elect should be multiplied, that is to say, increased by the number of her fortunate children; for she considers and protects as such all her devout clients.

St. Simeon received a promise from God that he should not die until he had seen the Messias born: *And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord* (Luke ii. 26). But this grace he only received through Mary, for it was in her arms that he found the Saviour. Hence, he who desires to find Jesus, will not find Him otherwise than by Mary. Let us, then, go to this Divine Mother if we wish to find Jesus, and let us go with great confidence.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

DANGERS TO OUR ETERNAL SALVATION

And when he entered into the boat his disciples followed him, and behold, a great tempest arose in the sea (Gospel of Sunday. Matt.viii. 23-27).

The boat on the sea represents man in this world. As a vessel is exposed to a thousand dangers, -- to pirates, to quicksands, to hidden rocks and to tempests, so man in this life is encompassed with perils. Who shall be able to deliver us? Only God: *Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it* (Ps. cxxvi. 2).

I.

In this day's Gospel we find that when Jesus Christ entered the boat with His disciples, a great tempest arose, so that the boat was on the point of being lost. During the storm the Saviour was asleep; but the disciples, terrified by the winds, ran to awake Him and said: *Lord save us: we perish*. Jesus gave them courage by saying: *Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm*.

The boat on the sea represents man in this world. As a vessel on the sea is exposed to a thousand dangers -- to pirates, to quicksands, to hidden rocks, and to tempests, so man in this life is encompassed with perils arising from the temptations of hell, from the occasions of sin, from the scandals or bad counsels of men, from human respect, and, above all, from the bad passions of corrupt nature, represented by the winds that agitate the sea and expose the vessel to great danger of being lost.

Thus, as St. Leo says, our life is full of dangers, of snares, and of enemies. The first enemy of the salvation of every Christian is his own corruption. *Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured* (James i. 14).

Along with the corrupt inclinations which live within us and drag us to evil, we have many enemies from without that fight against us. We have the devils with whom the contest is very difficult, because they are stronger than we are. Hence, because we have to contend with powerful enemies, St. Paul exhorts us to arm ourselves with the Divine aid: *Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places* (Ephes. vi. 11). The devil, according to St. Peter, is a lion who is continually going about, roaring through the rage and hunger which impel him to devour our souls. *Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion goeth about seeking*

whom he may devour (1 Pet. v. 8).

Even the very men with whom we must converse endanger our salvation. They persecute or betray us, or deceive us by their flattery and bad counsels. St. Augustine says that among the faithful there are in every profession deceitful men. Now if a fortress were full of rebels within, and encompassed by enemies from without, who is there that would not regard it as lost? Such is the condition of each of us as long as we live in this world. Who shall be able to deliver us from so many powerful enemies? Only God: *Unless the Lord keepeth the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it* (Ps. cxxvi. 2).

II.

What, then, is the means by which we can save our souls in the midst of so many dangers? It is to imitate the holy disciples -- to have recourse to our Divine Master, and say to Him: *Lord, save us: we perish*. When the tempest is violent, the pilot never takes his eyes from the light which guides him to the port. In like manner we should keep our eyes always turned to God Who alone can deliver us from the many dangers to which we are exposed. It was thus David acted when he found himself assailed by the dangers of sin. *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains from whence help shall come to me* (Ps. cxx. 1). To teach us to recommend ourselves continually to Him Who alone can save us by His grace, the Lord has ordained that, as long as we remain on this earth, we shall have to live in the midst of a continual tempest, and be surrounded by enemies. The temptations of the devil, the persecutions of men, the adversity which we suffer in this world, are not evils: they are, on the contrary, advantages, if we know how to make of them the use which God wishes, Who, for our welfare, sends or permits them. They detach our affections from this earth, and inspire a disgust for this world, by making us feel bitterness and thorns even in its honours, its riches, its delights, and amusements. The Lord permits all these apparent evils, that we may take our affection from fading goods, in which we meet with so many dangers of perdition, and that we may seek to unite ourselves with Him Who alone can make us happy.

Our error and mistake is, when we find ourselves harassed by infirmities, by poverty, by persecutions, and by such tribula-

tions, instead of having recourse to the Lord, we turn to creatures and place our confidence in their assistance. The Lord does not forbid us, in our afflictions and dangers to have recourse to human means; but He wishes us to have recourse to Himself before all others, and to place our only hope in Him, that we may also centre in Him all our love.

Spiritual Reading

"LORD SAVE US: WE PERISH."

As long as we live on this earth we must, according to St. Paul, work out our salvation in fear and trembling in the midst of the dangers by which we are beset. Once upon a time when a certain ship was in the open sea a great tempest arose which made the captain tremble. In the hold of the vessel there was an animal eating with as much tranquillity as if the sea were perfectly calm. The captain being asked why he was so much afraid, replied: If I had a soul like the soul of this brute, I too would be tranquil and without fear; but because I have a rational and an immortal soul, I am afraid of death, after which I must appear before the Judgment seat of God; and therefore I tremble through fear. Let us tremble. The salvation of our immortal souls is at stake. They who do not tremble, are, as St. Paul says, in great danger of being lost; because they who fear not, seldom recommend themselves to God, and labour but little to adopt the means of salvation. Let us beware! We are, says St. Cyprian, still in the battle, and still combat for eternal salvation.

The first means of salvation, then, is to recommend ourselves continually to God that He may keep His hands over us, and preserve us from offending Him. The next is to cleanse the soul from all past sins by making a General Confession. A General Confession is a powerful help to a change of life. When the tempest is violent the burden of the vessel is diminished, and every man on board throws his goods into the sea in order to save his life. O folly of sinners, who, in the midst of so great dangers of eternal perdition, instead of diminishing the burden of the vessel -- that is, instead of unburdening the soul of her sins -- load her with a greater weight. Instead of flying from the dangers of sin, they fearlessly continue to put themselves voluntarily into dangerous occasions; and, instead of having recourse to God's mercy

for the pardon of their offences, they offend Him still more, and compel Him to abandon them.

Another means is to labour strenuously not to allow ourselves to become the slaves of irregular passions. *Give me not over to a shameless and foolish mind* (Ecclus. xxiii. 6). Do not, O Lord, deliver me up to a mind blinded by passion. He who is thus blinded sees not what he is doing, and therefore he is in danger of falling into every crime. Hence it is so many are lost by submitting to the tyranny of their passions. Some are slaves to the passion of avarice. They do not resist the passion in the beginning, but foster it till death, and thus at their last moments leave but little reason to hope for their salvation. Others are slaves to sensual pleasures. They are not content with lawful gratifications, and therefore they pass to the indulgence of those that are forbidden. Others are subject to anger; and because they are not careful to check the fire at its commencement when it is small, it increases and grows into a spirit of revenge.

Disorderly affections, if they are not beaten down in the beginning, become our greatest tyrants. Many, says St. Ambrose, after having victoriously resisted the persecutions of the enemies of the Faith, were afterwards lost because they did not resist the first assaults of some earthly passion. Of this Origen was a miserable example. He fought for, and was prepared to give his life in defence of the Faith; but, by afterwards yielding to human respect, he was led to deny it, as we are told by Natalis Alexander. We have still a more miserable example in Solomon who, after having received so many gifts from God, and after being inspired by the Holy Ghost, was, by indulging in a passion for certain pagan women, induced to offer incense to idols. The unhappy man who submits to the slavery of his wicked passions, resembles the ox that is sent to the slaughter after a life of constant labour. During their whole lives worldlings groan under the weight of their sins, and, at the end of their days, fall into hell.

Let us conclude. When the winds are strong and violent, the pilot lowers the sails and casts anchor. So when we find ourselves assailed by any bad passion, we should always lower the sails; that is, we should avoid all the occasions that may increase the passion, and cast anchor by uniting ourselves to God, and by

begging of Him to give us strength not to offend Him.

But some will say: What am I to do? I live in the midst of the world where my passions continually assail me even against my will. I will answer in the words of Origen: "The man who lives in the darkness of the world and in the midst of secular business, can with difficulty serve God." Whoever then wishes to insure his eternal salvation, let him retire from the world, and take refuge in one of those exact Religious Communities which are the secure harbours in the sea of this world. If he cannot actually leave the world, let him leave it at least in affection by detaching his heart from the things of this world, and from his own evil inclinations: *Go not after thy lusts, says the Holy Ghost, but turn away from thy own will* (Ecclus. xviii. 30). Follow not your own concupiscence; and when your will impels you to evil, you must not indulge, but must resist its inclinations.

The time is short: it remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. vii. 29). The time of life is short; we should then, prepare for death, which is rapidly approaching; and to prepare for that awful moment let us reflect that everything in this world shall soon end. Hence the Apostle tells those who suffer in this life to be as if they suffered not, because the miseries of this life shall soon pass away, and they who save their souls shall be happy for eternity. And he exhorts those who enjoy the goods of this earth to be as if they enjoyed them not, because they must one day leave all things; and if they lose their souls, they shall be forever miserable.

Evening Meditation

THE DEATH OF THE JUST

I.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints (Ps. cxv. 15).

Viewed according to the senses, death excites fear and terror; but viewed with the eyes of Faith, it is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror; but to the Saints it is amiable and precious. "It is precious," says St. Bernard, "as the end of

labours, the consummation of victory, the gate of life." It is the end of toils and labours. *Man, says Job, born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries* (Job xiv. 1). Behold a picture of our life! It is short and all full of miseries, of infirmities, of fears, and of passions. What, says Seneca, do worldlings, who desire a long life, seek, but a continuation of torments? What, says St. Augustine, is a prolongation of life, but a prolongation of suffering? Yes, for as St. Ambrose tells us, the present life is given us not for repose, but that we may labour, and by our toils merit eternal glory. Hence Tertullian has justly said, that when God abridges life He abridges pain. Hence, though man has been condemned to death in punishment of sin, still the miseries of this life are so great, that, according to St. Ambrose, death appears to be a remedy and relief, rather than a chastisement. God pronounces happy all who die in His grace, because they terminate their labours and go to repose. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the, spirit, that they may rest from their labours* (Apoc. xiv. 13).

O my beloved Jesus, Who, to obtain for me a happy death, hast freely submitted to so painful a death on Calvary, when shall I see Thee? The first time I shall behold Thee, I shall see Thee as my Judge in the very place in which I shall expire. What shall I then say? What wilt Thou say to me? I will not wait till that moment to think of what I shall say: I will think on it now. I will say to Thee: My Redeemer, Thou art the God Who hast died for me! I have hitherto offended Thee; I have been ungrateful to Thee; I did not deserve pardon, but afterwards, assisted by Thy grace, I entered into myself, and, during the remainder of my life, I bewailed my sins, and Thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me again, now that I am at Thy feet, and give me a general absolution of all my sins. I did not deserve ever again to love Thee, because I despised Thy love; but Thou in Thy mercy drew my heart to Thee, so that if I have not loved Thee as Thou deservest, I have at least loved Thee above all things, and have left all to please Thee. I see that Paradise and the possession of Thee in Thy kingdom is too great a reward; but I cannot live at a distance from Thee, now, especially, after Thou hast shown me Thy amiable and beautiful countenance. I therefore

ask for Paradise, not to enjoy greater delights, but to love Thee more perfectly. Send me to Purgatory as long as Thou pleasest. Defiled as I am at present, I do not wish to enter into the land of purity, and to see myself among those pure souls. Send me to be purified; but do not banish me forever from Thy Presence. I shall be content to be one day, whenever Thou pleasest, called to Paradise to sing Thy mercies for all eternity. Ah, my beloved Jesus, raise Thy hand and bless me; tell me that I am Thine, and that Thou art and shall be forever mine. I will always love Thee, and Thou wilt forever love me. Behold, I go to a distance from Thee; I go into fire: but I go in peace because I go to love Thee, my Redeemer, my God, my All! I am content to go; but during my absence from Thee, I go, O Lord, to count the moments that will elapse before Thou callest me. Have mercy on a soul that loves Thee with all its power, and that sighs to see Thee that it may love Thee better.

Thus, I hope, O my Jesus, to speak to Thee at death. I entreat Thee to give me the grace to live in such a manner that I may then say to Thee what I now propose. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. Assist me, O Mary; Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

II.

The torments which afflict sinners at death do not disturb the peace of the Saints. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them* (Wis. iii. 1). That *Proficiscere! Depart!* so full of terror to worldlings does not alarm the Saints. The just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth, for he has always kept his heart detached from them. During life he has constantly said to the Lord: *Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever* (Ps. lxxii. 26). Happy you, said the Apostle to his disciples, who have been robbed of your goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. *You took with joy the being stripped of your goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance* (Heb. x. 34). The Saint is not afflicted at bidding an eternal farewell to honours, for he always hated them, and considered them to be what they really are -- smoke and vanity. He is not afflicted in leaving relatives, for he loved them only in God, and at death he recom-

mends them to the heavenly Father, Who loves them more than he does; and having a secure confidence of salvation, he expects to be better able to assist them from Heaven than on this earth. In a word, he who has constantly said during life: *My God and my All!* continues to repeat it with greater consolation and greater tenderness at the hour of death.

He who dies loving God, is not disturbed by the pains of death; but, seeing that he is now at the end of life, and that he has no more time to suffer for God, or to offer Him other proofs of his love, he accepts these pains with joy. With affection and peace he offers to God these last moments of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death to the Sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for him on the Cross to His Eternal Father. Thus he dies happily, saying: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest* (Ps. iv. 9). Oh! how great the peace of the Christian who dies abandoning himself to, and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ Who has loved us unto death, and has condescended to suffer so cruel a death in order to obtain for us a death full of sweetness and consolation.

Monday--Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE DEATH OF THE JUST IS A VICTORY.

The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in constant danger. The news of their approaching death filled the Saints with consolation. They knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end and that they should soon be in secure possession of the happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

I.

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more (Apoc. xxi. 4). Then at death the Lord will wipe away from the eyes of His servants all the tears they shed in this world, where they lived in the midst of fears, of dangers, and of combats with hell. The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God will experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that it will soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God to which it is exposed in this life, from so

many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil. The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in continual danger of losing our souls and God. St. Ambrose says that in this life *we walk among snares*. We walk continually amid the snares of enemies who lie in wait to deprive us of the life of grace. It was this danger that made St. Peter of Alcantara say at death to a Religious who, in attending the Saint, accidentally touched him: "Brother, remove, remove away from me; for I am still alive, and in danger of being lost." The thought of being freed by death from the danger of sin consoled St. Teresa, and made her rejoice as often as she heard the clock strike, that another hour of the combat had passed. Hence she would say: "In each moment of life I may sin and lose God." Hence, the news of their approaching death filled the Saints with consolation; because they knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end, and that they would soon be in secure possession of that happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

It is related in the Lives of the Fathers, that one of them who was very old, when dying, smiled while the others wept. Being asked why he smiled, he replied: "And why do you weep at seeing me go to rest?" Likewise St. Catherine of Sienna in her last moments said: "Rejoice with me, for I quit this land of pains and go to a place of peace." If, says St. Cyprian, you lived in a house whose walls and roof and floors were tottering, and threatened destruction, how ardently would you desire to fly from it! In this life everything menaces the ruin of the soul; the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses, all draw us to sin and eternal death.

Into thy hands I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth (Ps. xxx. 6). Ah, my sweet Redeemer, what would have become of me if Thou hadst deprived me of life when I was far from Thee? I should now be in hell, where I could never love Thee. I thank Thee for not having abandoned me, and for having bestowed on me so many great graces in order to gain my heart. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee above all things. Ah! I entreat Thee to make me always sensible of the evil I have done in despising Thee, and of the love

which Thy infinite goodness merits. I love Thee, and I desire to die soon if such be Thy will, that I may be freed from the danger of ever again losing Thy grace, and that I may be secure of loving Thee forever.

II.

Who, exclaimed the Apostle, *shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. vii. 24). Oh how great will be the joy of the soul in hearing these words: "Come, my spouse, from that land of tears. Come from *the dens of the lions* (Cant. iv. 8) that seek to devour you, and rob you of the Divine grace." Hence, St. Paul, sighing for death said that Jesus Christ was his only Life; and therefore he esteemed death his greatest gain, because by death he acquired that Life which never ends. *To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Phil. i. 21).

In taking away a soul while it is in the state of grace out of this world, where it may change its will and lose His friendship, God bestows on it a great favour. *He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding* (Wis. iv. 11). Happy in this life is the man that lives in union with God; but as the sailor is not secure until he has arrived at the port and escaped the tempest, so the soul cannot enjoy complete happiness until it has left this world in the grace of God. "Praise," says St. Maximus, "the felicity of the sailor, but not until he has reached the port." Now, if at his approach to the port the sailor rejoices, how much greater ought not the joy and gladness of a Christian to be who is at the point of securing eternal salvation?

Moreover, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial sins. *For*, says the Holy Ghost, *a just man shall fall seven times* (Prov. xxiv. 16). He who quits this life ceases to offend God. "For," says St. Ambrose, "what is death but the burial of vices?" This consideration makes souls that love God long for death. The Venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself at death, saying: "By ceasing to live, I cease forever to offend God." And St. Ambrose said: "Why do we desire this life, in which, the longer we live, the more we are loaded with sins?" He who dies in the grace of God can never more offend Him, says the same holy Doctor. Hence, the Lord praises the *dead* more than any man *living*, though he be a Saint. (Ecclus. iv. 2). A certain spiritual man gave directions that

the person who should bring him the news of death, should say: "Console yourself! The time has arrived when you will no longer offend God."

Ah, my beloved Jesus, during these remaining years of my life, give me strength to do something for Thee before I die. Give me strength against all temptations, and against my passions, but particularly against the passion which has hitherto most violently drawn me to sin. Give me patience in all infirmities, and under all the injuries I may receive from men. I now, for the love of Thee, pardon all who have shown me any contempt, and I beg of Thee to bestow upon them the graces which they stand in need of. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial faults, about which I have been hitherto negligent. My Saviour, assist me. I hope for all graces through Thy merits. O Mary, my Mother, and my hope, I place unbounded confidence in thee.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

3. -- ST. SEBASTIAN, OFFICER IN THE ARMY OF DIOCLETIAN

(January 20)

This Saint was born of Christian parents who dwelt at Narbonne, in Languedoc, but were natives of Milan. St. Ambrose relates that by reason of his extraordinary talents and exemplary conduct, our Saint was much beloved by Diocletian who appointed him captain of the first company of his guards. Sebastian employed the emoluments of his station in the relief of the poor, and was indefatigable in assisting his brother Christians, particularly those who languished in prison whom he not only relieved with alms, but encouraged to suffer for Jesus Christ. He was consequently considered the main support of the persecuted faithful.

At this time it happened that the two brothers, Marcus and Marcellianus, Roman knights, who had suffered tortures with considerable constancy, were being led to death, when their father, Tarquillinus, and their mother, Marcia, accompanied by the wives and children of the two Confessors, obtained from the judge, Cromatius, by tears and entreaties, that the sentence should be deferred for thirty days. It is easy to imagine what

wailings and entreaties were used by their relatives during the respite in order to induce the two brothers to apostatise. Indeed, they were so importunate and unceasing in their efforts, that they who had already confessed the Faith began now to vacillate. But Sebastian, who knew them, ran instantly to their assistance, and God's blessing so accompanied his words that he induced them to receive with joy a most cruel death; for they were obliged to hang nailed by the feet to a gallows for a day and a night before they were transfixed with a lance. Nor was this all. The zealous captain likewise converted to the Faith not only all the above-named relatives of Marcus and Marcellianus, but also Nicostratus, an officer of Cromatius, and Claudius, the provost of the prison, and sixty-four prisoners who were idolaters.

But the most remarkable conversion was that of Cromatius himself who, hearing that Tarquillinus had embraced the Faith, sent for him and said: "Hast thou, then, become mad in the last days of thy life?" The good old man replied: "On the contrary, by embracing the Christian Faith I have become wise, for it is wisdom to prefer an everlasting life to the few wretched days that await me in this world." He then persuaded him to have an interview with St. Sebastian who quickly persuaded him of the truth of the Christian Religion; and Cromatius, having received Baptism, with his entire family, and one thousand four hundred slaves, to whom he granted their freedom, renounced his office and retired to his country house.

Fabian, the successor of Cromatius, having learned that Sebastian not only exhorted the Christians to remain steadfast to the Faith, but procured also the conversion of the pagans, reported the fact to the emperor who sent for our Saint and upbraided him with the crime of perverting his subjects. Sebastian answered that he considered he was rendering the greatest possible service to the emperor, since the state benefited by having Christian subjects, whose fidelity to their sovereign is proportionate to their devotedness to Jesus Christ. The emperor, enraged at this reply, ordered that the Saint should be instantly tied to a post, and that a body of archers should discharge their arrows against him. The sentence was immediately executed, and Sebastian was left for dead; but a holy widow, named Irene,

went at night to bury him and finding him yet alive brought him to her house where he recovered. After this the Saint went to the emperor, and said to him: "How long, O Prince, wilt thou believe the calumnies that have been spread against the Christians? I have returned to tell thee again that thou hast not in the empire subjects more faithful than the Christians, who by their prayers obtain for thee all thy prosperity."

Diocletian, surprised to see the Saint still living, exclaimed: "How is it that thou art yet alive?" Sebastian answered: "the Lord has been pleased to preserve my life that I might admonish thee of thy impiety in persecuting the Christians."

The emperor, irritated at the admonition, ordered that the Saint should be scourged to death. This sentence being executed, he expired on the 20th January, about the year 228.

The pagans threw the body of the Martyr into a marsh, but a holy lady named Lucina caused it to be taken thence, and buried it at the entrance of a cemetery now called the "Catacombs of St. Sebastian."

Evening Meditation

THE PATIENCE OF GOD IN WAITING FOR SINNERS

I.

Who in this world has so much patience with his equals as God has with us His creatures, in bearing with us and waiting for our repentance after the many offences we have committed against Him?

Ah, my God, had I thus offended my brother or my father, long ago would he have driven me from his face! O Father of Mercies, *cast me not away from thy face* (Ps. l. 13), but have pity on me.

Thou hast mercy, says the Wise Man, *upon all, because thou canst do all things, and overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance* (Wis. xi. 24). Men conceal their sense of the injuries which they receive, either because they are good, and know that it belongs not to themselves to punish those who offend them; or because they are unable, and have not the power, to revenge themselves. But to Thee, my God, it does belong to take revenge for the offences which are committed against Thy infinite Majesty; and Thou indeed art able to avenge Thyself whenever Thou pleasest,

and dost Thou dissemble? Men despise Thee; they make promises to Thee and afterwards betray Thee; and dost Thou seem not to behold them, or as if Thou hadst little concern for Thy honour?

Thus, O Jesus, hast Thou done towards me. Ah! my God, my infinite Good, I will no longer despise Thee, I will no longer provoke Thee to chastise me. And why should I delay until Thou abandonest me in reality and condemnest me to hell? I am truly sorry for all my offences against Thee. I would that I had died rather than offended Thee! Thou art my Lord, Thou hast created me, and Thou hast redeemed me by Thy death; Thou alone hast loved me, Thou alone deservest to be loved, and Thou alone shall be the sole object of my love.

II.

My soul, how could you be so ungrateful and so daring against your God? When you offended Him, could He not have suddenly called you out of life and punished you in hell? And yet He waited for you. Instead of chastising you, He preserved your life and gave you good things. But you, instead of being grateful to Him and loving Him for such excessive goodness, have continued to offend Him!

O my Lord, since Thou hast waited for me with so great mercy, I give Thee thanks. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee. I might at this hour have dwelt in hell where I could not have repented, nor have loved Thee. But now that I can repent, I grieve with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite goodness; and I love Thee above all things, more than I love myself. Forgive me, and grant that from this day I may love no other but Thee, Who hast so loved me. May I live for Thee alone, my Redeemer, Who for me didst die upon the Cross! All my hopes are in Thy bitter Passion. O Mary, Mother of God, assist me by thy holy intercession.

Tuesday--Fourth Week after Epiphany **Morning Meditation**

*FROM THE JUST LIFE IS NOT TAKEN, BUT ONLY EX-
CHANGED FOR A BETTER.*

He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through the

gate of death. Death is the end of labour and the gate of life, says St. Bernard. *This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter into it.*

I.

Death is not only the end of labours but it is also the gate of life. He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through this gate. *This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter into it* (Ps. cxvii. 20). St. Jerome entreated death to open its gates to him: *Aperi mihi, soror mea*. Death, my sister, if you do not open the door to me, I cannot enter to enjoy my Lord. Seeing in his house a picture in which death was represented with a knife in the hand, St. Charles Borromeo sent for a painter, and ordered him to substitute for the knife a golden key, in order that he might be more and more inflamed with a desire of death, which opens Paradise and admits us to the vision of God.

If, says St. John Chrysostom, a king had prepared for one of his subjects apartments in his own palace, but for a time obliged him to live in a tent, how ardently would the vassal sigh for the day on which he should leave the tent to enter into the palace. In this life the soul, being in the body, is as it were confined in a prison which she must leave in order to enter the celestial palace. Hence David prayed to the Lord *to bring his soul out of prison* (Ps. cxl. 8). When the holy Simeon held the Infant Jesus in his arms, he asked no other grace than to be delivered from the prison of the present life. *Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord*, (Luke ii. 29). "As if detained by necessity, he," says St. Ambrose, "begs to be dismissed." The Apostle desired the same grace when he said: *I am straitened, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ* (Phil. i. 23).

How great was the joy of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh when he heard from Joseph that he should soon be rescued from the prison and restored to his position! And will not a soul that loves God exult with gladness at hearing that it will soon be released from the prison of this earth and go to enjoy God? *While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord* (2 Cor. v. 6). While the soul is united to the body, it is at a distance from the vision of God, as if in a strange land, and excluded from its true country. Hence, according to St. Bruno, the departure of the soul from the body should not be called death, but the beginning of life.

O God of my soul, I have hitherto dishonoured Thee by turning my back upon Thee, but Thy Son has honoured Thee by offering to Thee the sacrifice of His life on the Cross. Through the honour which Thy beloved Son has given Thee, pardon the dishonour which I have done Thee. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended Thee, and I promise henceforth to love nothing but Thee. From Thee I hope for salvation: whatever good is in me at present is the fruit of Thy grace; to Thee I ascribe it all. *By the grace of God, I am what I am* (1 Cor. xv. 10). If I have hitherto dishonoured Thee, I hope to honour Thee in Heaven by blessing and praising Thy mercy forever.

II.

The *death of the Saints* is called their *Birthday*; because at death they are born to that life of bliss which will never end. St. Athanasius says: "To the just, death is only a passage to eternal life." "O amiable death," says St. Augustine, "who will not desire thee who art the end of evils, the conclusion of labour, the beginning of everlasting repose?" Hence the holy Doctor frequently prayed for death that he might see God.

The sinner, St. Cyprian says, has just reason to fear death, because he will pass from temporal to eternal death. But he who is in the state of grace, and hopes to pass from death to life, fears not death. In the *Life of St. John the Almoner*, we read that a certain rich man recommended to the prayers of the Saint an only son, and gave the Saint a large sum of money to be distributed in alms, for the purpose of obtaining from God a long life for his son. The son died soon after; and when the father complained of his death, God sent an Angel to say to him: "You sought for your son a *long life*: he now enjoys *eternal life* in Heaven." This is, as was promised by the Prophet Osee, the grace which Jesus Christ merited for us. *O death, I shall be thy death* (Osee xiii. 41). By dying for us, Jesus has changed death into life. When Pionius, the Martyr, was being brought to the stake, he was asked by those who conducted him, how he could go to death with so much joy. "You err," replied the Saint: "I go not to death but to life." Thus, also, did the mother of the youthful St. Symphorian exhort him to Martyrdom. "My son," said she, "life is not taken from you; it

is only exchanged for a better one."

I feel a great desire to love Thee, O my God. This Thou hast given me: I thank Thee for it, O my Love! Continue, continue the aid which Thou hast begun to give me. I hope to be henceforth Thine and entirely Thine. And what greater pleasure can I enjoy than that of pleasing Thee, my Lord, Who art so amiable, and Who hast loved me so tenderly! O my God, I ask only for love, love, love, and I hope always to ask this love of Thee, until, dying in Thy love, I reach the kingdom of love where I shall be filled with love, and never for a single moment for all eternity cease to love Thee and to love Thee with all my strength. Mary, my Mother, who lovest thy God so intensely, and who desirest so vehemently to see Him loved, obtain for me the grace to love Him ardently in this life, that I may love Him ardently forever in the next.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

4. -- ST. AGNES, VIRGIN

(January 21)

The name of St. Agnes has obtained universal celebrity. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Maximus, Prudentius and other illustrious writers,* have been her panegyrists, and she is also mentioned in the Canon of the Mass.

*By the writings and tongues of all nations, particularly in the churches, hath St. Agnes been praised, who overcame the tenderness of her age and the cruelty of the tyrant, and sanctified the honour of her chastity with the glory of martyrdom."

-- St. Jerome.

She is said to have been descended from very noble and pious parents, and to have been but twelve or thirteen years of age at the time of her Martyrdom. Her extraordinary beauty caused her to be desired by many as their bride, but her principal suitor was Procopius, son of Symphronius, governor of Rome, who sent her a rich present, signifying that he was most anxious to be her husband. But the Saint, who had dedicated her virginity and all her affections to Jesus Christ, answered him that she had been promised to another spouse. Procopius, nothing discouraged by this answer, continued his importunities, until at last the Saint,

wishing to free herself forever from his unwelcome attentions, said to him: "Begone from me, thou food of death! I am already engaged to another and far better Spouse. He is the King of Heaven to Whom I have consecrated my entire being."

Procopius not knowing what to do, employed the assistance of his father, Symphronius, whose authority, he thought, might induce Agnes to comply. The governor accordingly summoned her to his presence, and told her he could not conceive why she should refuse the hand of his son, as it was impossible for her to obtain a more advantageous match. The Saint replied that she had a Divine Spouse, Who was far preferable to his son. The governor being unable to conceive what she meant by a "Divine Spouse," one of the gentlemen in waiting said to him: "That young lady is a Christian, and the Divine Spouse to Whom she refers is none other than the God of the Christians." Hereupon the governor, changing his tone, told her that she should abandon that sect and its maxims altogether, or else not only lose the good fortune which now presented itself, but be exposed to infamy and the most cruel torments. He concluded by giving her four-and-twenty hours to consider whether, under these circumstances, she would obstinately continue to be a Christian. Agnes boldly replied that she required no time for deliberation, as she was already resolved to have no other spouse than Jesus Christ, and that neither torments or death could frighten her, as she was most anxious to lay down her life for Him.

The governor then thought to intimidate her by threatening to have her sent to an infamous place, to be there dishonoured, but the Saint replied: "My confidence is placed in Jesus Christ, my Spouse, Who is Omnipotent -- He will defend me from all outrage." Enraged at this answer, Symphronius ordered her to be handcuffed, and dragged in chains before the idols, that she might offer incense, but on arriving at the place, she made the Sign of the Cross, declaring that her Crucified Spouse alone should be adored. She was then led, by force, to a wicked house. But anyone who approached her with an immodest intent, became so overawed as not to be able to look at the Saint. Only one rash young man, whom some suppose to have been Procopius, attempted to offer her violence; but as Cardinal Orsi here

observes, the impure wretch soon experienced the jealousy with which the "Spouse of Virgins" defends them, for a flash of lightning struck him blind, and he fell as if dead upon the ground. While his companions were endeavouring to afford him some relief and were already bewailing him as dead, the Saint was requested to pray for him, and this she did; whereupon he instantly recovered and again received his sight.

The governor, surprised at this miracle, was inclined to dismiss the holy virgin; but the idolatrous priests exclaimed that it was the effect of magic, and excited the people to demand that Agnes should be put to death as a witch. The governor, fearing a sedition if he should discharge her, and, on the other hand, being unwilling to put her to death, left the judgment of the case to his lieutenant, Aspasius, who being forced to it by the populace, condemned her to be burned alive. The funeral pile was according erected, the Saint was placed upon it and the fire kindled; but the flames, respecting her person, divided themselves on either side, and consumed many of the idolaters who were assisting at the execution.

The priests and the people continued to cry out that it was the work of the devil, and compelled the lieutenant to send an executioner to behead her. The horror of such an execution caused even this minister of cruelty to turn pale, and, says St. Ambrose, he trembled to give the stroke. But the Saint animated him, saying: "Haste thee to destroy this my body, which could give pleasure to others to the offending of my Divine Spouse. Fear not to give me that death which to me shall be the commencement of eternal life." Having raised her eyes to Heaven, and besought Jesus Christ to receive her soul, this tender virgin received the stroke of death, and went to receive from her Saviour the palm of her triumph.

As early as the time of Constantine the Great, a church was erected in honour of St. Agnes, and her festival is celebrated twice a year by the Church -- on the twenty-first of January, in honour of her earthly triumph; and on the 28th of the same month, in commemoration of her heavenly reward.*

*The martyrdom of St. Agnes took place, according to Ruinart, about the year 304. Her virginal body was religiously

deposited in a place belonging to her parents. The following is contained in the Roman Breviary, January 28: "One night when the parents of the blessed Agnes were watching at her grave, she appeared to them in company with a band of virgins, and said to them: 'Father and mother, weep not for me as though I were dead; for now these virgins and I live together in Him Whose love was my whole life upon earth.' Some years afterwards, Constance, the daughter of the Emperor Constantine, being sick of an incurable ulcer, betook herself to the said grave, although she was not yet a Christian, and as she lay by it and slept, she seemed to hear the voice of Agnes saying to her: 'Constance, be of good courage; believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and He will make thee whole.' The princess being healed, was baptized along with many others of the emperor's family and household, and afterwards built over the grave of the blessed Agnes a church named in her honour."

Evening Meditation

IN GOD ALONE IS FOUND TRUE PEACE.

I.

He that seeks peace in creatures will never find it, because no creatures are fitted to give satisfaction to the heart. God has created man for Himself Who is an Infinite Good; wherefore God alone can content man. Hence it comes that many persons, though loaded with riches, honours and earthly pleasures, are never satisfied; they are ever seeking for more honours, more possessions, and more amusements; and, however many they obtain, they are always restless, and never enjoy a day of true peace. *Delight thou in the Lord, and he shall give thee the requests of thy heart* (Ps. xxxvi. 4). When a person delights only in God, and seeks nothing but God, God Himself will take care to satisfy all the desires of his heart, and then he will attain the happy state of those souls who desire nothing but to please God.

Senseless are they who say: "Happy he who can employ himself as he likes! Who can command others! Who can take what pleasures he pleases!" It is madness. He alone is happy who loves God; who says that God alone is sufficient for him. Experience shows clearly that multitudes of persons who are called fortunate by men of the world because in possession of great riches and

raised to great dignities, live a miserable life and never find rest.

But how is it that so many rich and titled people and princes, in the midst of the abundance of the goods of the world, do not find peace? And, on the other hand, how is it that so many good Religious who live retired in a cell, poor and hidden, pass their days so happily? How is it that so many Solitaries, living in a desert or a cave, suffering hunger and cold, yet rejoice with gladness? It is because they lean only on God, and God comforts them.

The peace of God surpasseth all understanding (Phil. iv. 7). Oh, how the peace which the Lord gives those who love Him exceeds all the delights which the world can give! *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps. xxxiii. 9). O ye men of the world, cries the Prophet, why will ye despise the way of the Saints without having ever known it? Try it for once; leave the world, abandon it, and give yourself to God, and you will see how well He knows how to comfort you more than all the honours and delights of this world.

O my God, give me strength to separate myself from all the snares that draw me to the world. Grant that I may think of nothing but to please Thee.

II.

It is true that even the Saints meet with great troubles in this life, but they, resigning themselves to the will of God, never lose their peace. The lovers of the world seem now at times joyful, and at times sad, but in truth, they are ever restless and in a state of confusion. On the other hand, the lovers of God are superior to all adversity and to the changes of this world, and therefore they live in uniform tranquillity. The celebrated Cardinal Petrucci describes a soul that is wholly given to God "It beholds all things around change into a thousand various forms, while within, the depths of its own heart ever united with God, continue changeless."

But he who would live ever united with God, and would enjoy a continual peace, must drive from his heart everything that is not God, and live as if he were dead to earthly affections.

Happy are they for whom God alone is sufficient! O Lord, give me grace that I may seek nothing but Thee, and ask for

nothing but to love Thee and give Thee pleasure. For love of Thee I now renounce all earthly pleasures, I renounce all spiritual consolations. I desire nothing but to do Thy will and to give Thee pleasure. O Mother of God, recommend me to thy Son Who denies thee nothing.

Wednesday--Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE JUST HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR AT DEATH.

Hell will not cease to attack and tempt even the Saints at the hour of their death. But it is also true that God will not cease to assist and multiply helps for His faithful servants. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God and the torment of death shall not touch them* (Wis. iii. 1).

I.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. If God holds fast in His hands the souls of the just, who can snatch them from Him? It is true that hell does not cease to tempt and attack even the Saints at the hour of death; but it is also true that God does not cease to assist and to multiply helps for His faithful servants, whenever their danger is increased. "There is greater aid," says St. Ambrose, "where there is greater peril, because God is a Helper in due time." The servant of Eliseus was struck with terror when he saw the city encompassed with enemies; but the Saint inspired him with courage, saying: *Fear not, for there are more with us than with them* (4 Kings vi. 16). He then showed him an army of Angels sent by God to defend the city. The devil will come to tempt the dying Christian, but his Angel Guardian will come to strengthen him; his holy advocates will come. St. Michael whom God has appointed to defend His faithful servants in their last combat with hell, will come; the Divine Mother will chase away the devils and protect her servant; above all, Jesus Christ will come to guard against every temptation of hell, the innocent or penitent sheep for whose salvation He gave His life. He will give that confidence and strength of which the soul will stand in need in that last struggle with its enemies. Hence, full of courage, it will say: *The Lord hath become my helper* (Ps. xxix. 11). *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?* (Ps. xxvi. 1).

God, says Origen, is more solicitous for our salvation than the devil is eager for our perdition; for the Lord loves our souls far more than the devil hates them.

God is faithful, says the Apostle, *Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able* (1 Cor. x. 13). But you will say: Many Saints have died with great fear of being lost. I answer: We have but few examples of persons who, after leading a holy life, died with fears for their eternal salvation. To purify them at the hour of death from some defect, God sometimes permits holy souls to be disturbed by such fears. But generally the servants of God have died with a joyful countenance. At death the Judgment of God excites fear in all; but if sinners pass from terror to despair, the Saints rise from fear to confidence. St. Antoninus relates that in a severe illness, St. Bernard trembled through fear of Judgment and was tempted to despair. But thinking of the merits of Jesus Christ, he drove away all fear, saying to his Saviour: *Thy wounds are my merits! Vulnera tua, merita mea!* St. Hilarion also was seized with fear; but he said: "Go forth my soul! What do you fear? For nearly seventy years you have served Christ, and are you now afraid of death?" My soul, what do you fear? Have you not served a God Who is faithful and knows not how to abandon at death the Christian who has been faithful to Him during life?

Ah, my Jesus, when will the day arrive on which I can say: My God, I can never lose Thee! When shall I see Thee face to face, and be sure of loving Thee with all my strength for eternity? Ah, my Sovereign Good, my only Love, as long as I have life I shall be in danger of offending Thee and of losing Thy grace. There was an unhappy time when I did not love Thee, but on the contrary, despised Thy love. I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and desire to do all in my power to love and please Thee.

II.

Father Joseph Scamacca, of the Society of Jesus, being asked if in dying he felt confidence in God, said: "Have I served Mahomet, that I should now doubt of the goodness of my God, or of His desire to save me?"

Should the thought of having offended God at some time in the past molest us at death, let us remember that He has protested that He forgets the iniquities of all penitent sinners. *If the wicked do penance, - I will not remember all his iniquities* (Ezech. xviii. 21). But you may ask: How can I be sure of having received pardon from God? St. Basil asks the same question: "How can any one be certain that God has forgiven his sins?" "He can be certain of pardon," answers the Saint, "if he can say: I have hated and abhorred iniquity." He who detests sin can rest secure of having obtained pardon from God. The heart of man cannot exist without loving some object; it must love creatures or God. If it loves not creatures, it loves God. And who are they that love God? All who observe His commands. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me* (Jo. xiv. 21). He, then, who dies in the observance of the Commandments, dies in the love of God, and he that loves fears not. *Charity casteth out fear* (1 Jo. iv. 18).

But I am still in danger of refusing Thee my love, O my Jesus, and of again turning my back upon Thee. Ah, Jesus, my Life, my Treasure, do not permit it! Should this misfortune ever happen to me, take me this moment out of life by the most cruel of deaths. I am content to suffer such a death, and I entreat Thee to send me such a death, sooner than permit me ever to cease to love Thee. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, do not abandon me to so great an evil. Chastise me as Thou wishest. I deserve and accept any chastisement Thou art pleased to inflict upon me; but preserve me from the punishment of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and Thy love. My Jesus, recommend me to Thy Father. Mary, my Mother, recommend me to thy Son. Obtain for me perseverance in His friendship, and the grace to love Him, and then may He do with me according to His will.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

5.--ST. VINCENT, DEACON

(January 22)

St. Vincent, one of the most celebrated Martyrs of Spain, was born of a noble family in the city of Saragossa. While very young he was placed under the tutelage of Valerius, Bishop of

that Church, who with great pains instructed him in the doctrines of religion, giving him at the same time a very extensive acquaintance with human sciences. Vincent having made wonderful progress in learning, was ordained deacon by this prelate who, being himself prevented from preaching by an impediment in his speech, entrusted this office to Vincent. The young Levite discharged this important duty with such success that many sinners and even pagans were converted by his discourses.

At that time, namely, in the year 303, Spain was under the rule of Maximian, and Dacian was governor of the province of Tarragona in which Saragossa was situated. Dacian was a most cruel man, and an unrelenting persecutor of the Christians. Hearing of the manner in which Vincent advanced the Christian Faith, he had him arrested, together with his Bishop, Valerius, and brought to Valencia, where he resided. He caused them to suffer much in prison, thinking that by maltreatment he would render them easier to be conquered, but he soon perceived that this means did not correspond to the end he had in view. When brought into his presence, he first endeavoured by kindness to induce them to apostatize. To Valerius he represented that his declining age and infirmity required that repose which he might obtain by obeying the imperial edicts, but if he resisted he would feel the effects of their just anger. Then turning to Vincent he said: "You are young, and should not despise the reward of fortune which you may earn by abandoning your religion. Obey, young man, the commands of the emperors, and do not, by refusal expose yourself to an ignominious death."

Whereupon Vincent, turning to Valerius, who as yet had made no reply to the governor, said: "Father, if thou wilt, I shall answer for thee." The saintly bishop, resolved to suffer for Jesus Christ, replied: "Yes, my son, as I formerly entrusted to thee the preaching of God's holy word, I now charge thee to witness to our Faith." The holy deacon then declared to Dacian that they adored one only God, and could not worship the gods of the empire, who were devils, adding: "Do not think to shake our fortitude with threats of death or promises of reward, because there is nothing in this world which can be compared with the honour and pleasure of dying for Jesus Christ." Dacian irritated by such

liberty of speech said to the holy deacon: "Either you must offer incense to the gods or you must pay with your life for the contempt you show." To this Vincent, raising his voice, replied as follows: "I have already told you that the greatest pleasure and the most distinguished honour that you can procure for us is to make us die for Jesus Christ. You may rest assured that you will grow weary of inflicting torments sooner than we of suffering them."

Dacian condemned Valerius to banishment, and resolved to wreak his vengeance upon Vincent.

He first caused him to be stretched upon the rack, by which horrid machine the Saint's arms and legs were so stretched, that the bystanders could hear the noise of the dislocation of the joints, which remained attached only by the stretched and torn sinews. Dacian perceived the placid meekness with which the young Martyr endured his torments, and, as Fleury observes, heard him say, "Behold, what I have ever desired is now being accomplished! Behold the happy consummation of what I have always sighed for!" The tyrant hence concluded that the executioners were remiss in making him feel the torments, and caused them to be beaten with rods.

He then commanded that the sides of the Saint should be torn with iron hooks, until the ribs were visible; and knowing how much the pain would increase by allowing the wounds to cool, and then opening them afresh, he ordered this torture which was inflicted with great cruelty until the bowels appeared, and the blood flowed in torrents. Meanwhile, as Orsi relates, the Martyr insulted the tyrant, saying: "Since thy cruel ministers have exhausted their strength, come, thou chief butcher, and help them. Stretch forth thy wicked hands and slake thy thirst in my blood. Thou art deceived, thinking that torments can overcome my Faith -- within me there is another man strengthened by God, whom thou canst not subdue."

Hereupon, seeing his constancy, Dacian ordered a cessation of his tortures, begging of the Saint, for his own sake, that if he persisted in refusing to sacrifice to the gods, he would at least give up the Sacred Books to be burned. Vincent answered that fire was not created by God to burn holy books, but to torture the wicked in hell. Nor did he hesitate to admonish him, that if

he did not abandon the worship of idols, he would be one day condemned to eternal flames. The governor, more incensed than ever, condemned him to the most cruel of torments -- that of being broiled on a species of grid-iron studded with sharp points. The Saint hearing this barbarous command, anticipated his executioners and walked with joy to the frightful engine. Such was his eagerness to suffer. Upon this gridiron the Saint was stretched at full length, bound hand and foot while the fire burned beneath. Red-hot plates of iron were placed on his mangled flesh, and his wounds were rubbed with salt which the activity of the fire forced deeper into his burned and lacerated body. In the midst of these tortures the countenance of the Martyr evinced the inward consolation and joy of his soul, while, with eyes raised to Heaven, he blessed the Lord, and besought Him to receive his sacrifice. All admitted the prodigious fortitude with which God inspired the holy youth, and the pagans themselves declared that it was miraculous.

The effect the sight of such patience produced obliged Dacian to remove him from the public view. Yet not content with the tortures he had already inflicted, he caused him to be thrown into a dungeon, his feet placed very wide apart in wooden stocks, the pain of which was so great that many Martyrs died under it. His body was then stretched upon potsherds which, opening his wounds afresh, caused the most painful anguish. In order to weary his patience, strict orders were given that no one should be admitted to see or offer him the least consolation; but the Saint at midnight perceived his dungeon illuminated by a celestial light, and perfumed by a heavenly odour. The Lord then sent His Angels to console him, to intimate that his tortures were at an end, and to assure him of the reward of his fidelity. The jailers, being awakened by the splendour of the light, approached, and heard the Martyr in concert with the Angels rendering praises to the Lord. They believed and professed the Christian Faith.

Dacian being informed of this, ordered that the Saint should be removed from prison to a soft bed, and that his wounds should be healed, with the intention of renewing his torments when he would be sufficiently recovered to bear them. The faith-

ful being permitted to visit and console him, kissed his wounds and absorbed the blood in their napkins which they preserved as most precious relics. But the time for our Saint's triumph had arrived, and he expired in the embraces of his brethren; while his soul was wafted by the Angels who had assisted him to the regions of everlasting bliss.

The tyrant on hearing of his death commanded that his body should be exposed to be devoured by wild beasts; but a raven was sent by God to defend it with its claws and beak, even against a wolf that had come to devour it. Dacian having exhausted his malice, ordered that the body should be put in a sack weighted with stones and cast into the sea. But there is no power against the Lord. The body floated like a feather on the water and was carried by the waves as far as Valencia. The mariners tried to get possession of it, but before they could reach it, it was carried by the waves to the seashore and covered with sand.

The Saint afterwards appeared to a pious lady named Ionica, and indicated the place where his body lay. She went there accompanied by other Christians, and finding the relics deposited them in a little chapel. After the persecution had ceased, they were translated to a magnificent church outside the walls of Valencia, where they have always been regarded with devout veneration. St. Augustine attests that at his time the feast of St. Vincent was celebrated with a special joy in all the countries whither the Christian religion had penetrated.

Evening Meditation

WE OUGHT TO HAVE GOD ALONE IN VIEW.

I.

In all our actions we should have no other end in view than the good pleasure of God, -- not the pleasure of relatives, friends, great people, or ourselves, because whatever is not done for God is lost. Many things are done for the sake of pleasure, or in order not to displease men; but, says St. Paul: *If I yet please men, I should not be the servant of God* (Gal. i. 10). God alone must be regarded in everything we do, so that we may say, as Jesus Christ said, *I do always the things that please him* (Jo. viii. 29). It is God Who has given us everything we have; we have nothing of our own except nothingness and sin. It is God alone Who has truly loved us. He

has loved us from eternity, and He has loved us so far as to give Himself for us upon the Cross and in the Sacrament of the Altar. God alone, therefore, deserves all our love.

Unhappy is the soul that looks with affection upon any object on earth which displeases God. It will never know peace in this life, and it is in imminent peril of never enjoying peace in the next. But happy is he, O my God, who seeks Thee alone, and renounces everything for Thy love. He will find the pearl of Thy pure love, a jewel more precious than all the treasures and kingdoms of the earth. He that does this obtains the true liberty of the sons of God, for he finds himself freed from all the bonds that would bind him to earth and hinder him from uniting himself to God.

My God and my All, I prefer Thee to all the riches of the world, to honours, to knowledge, to glory, and to all gifts that Thou couldst give me. Thou art all my Good. Thee alone I desire and nothing more, for Thou alone art infinitely beautiful, infinitely kind, infinitely worthy of love, in a word, Thou art the only Good. Wherefore every gift that is not Thyself is not enough for me. I repeat, and I will ever repeat it, I desire Thee alone and nothing more; and whatever is less than Thee, I say it again, is not sufficient for me.

II.

Let men undeceive themselves, -- all good things that come from creatures are but dust, smoke, deceit. God alone can satisfy them. But in this life He does not grant us to enjoy Him fully; He only gives us certain foretastes of the good things which He promises us in Heaven. There He waits to satisfy us with His own joy, when He will say to us: *Enter into the joy of thy Lord* (Matt. xxv. 21). The Lord gives spiritual consolations to His servants, only to make them yearn for that happiness which He prepares for them in Paradise.

Oh, when will it be given me to occupy myself solely in praising Thee, O God, and loving Thee, and pleasing Thee, so that I shall no more think of the creature, nor even of myself? O my Lord and my Love, help me when Thou seest me growing cold in Thy love, and in danger of giving my affection to creatures and to earthly goods; *Stretch forth thy hand from on high, take*

me out, and deliver me from many waters (Ps. cxliii. 7). Deliver me from the danger of wandering far from Thee.

Let others seek what they will; I desire nothing but Thee, my God, my Love and my Hope: *What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever* (Ps. lxxii. 25).

O Almighty God, O God worthy of love, grant that in all things we may henceforth love and seek nothing but Thy pleasure. Grant that Thou mayest be our only Love, since Thou alone doth out of justice and gratitude, deserve all our affections. No greater pain afflicts me than the thought that in times past I have so little loved Thy infinite goodness. But I desire and resolve with Thy help, to love Thee with all my strength for the time to come, and thus I hope to die, loving Thee alone, my sovereign Good. O Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a miserable being. Thy prayers are never refused. Pray to Jesus that He may make me all His own.

Thursday--Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE JUST DIE IN A SWEET PEACE.

In the sight of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, with sorrow and reluctance. But God knows how to console His children even in the midst of the pains of death. *In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for misery, and their going away from us for utter destruction; but they are in peace* (Wis. iii. 1).

I.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God.... In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for misery.

In the sight of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, with sorrow and reluctance. But God knows well how to console His children in their last moments; and, even in the midst of the pains of death, He infuses into their souls certain sweetnesses, as a foretaste of Paradise, which He will soon bestow upon them. As they who die in sin begin to experience on the bed of death a certain foretaste of hell, remorse and terrors and fits of despair, so, on the other hand, the Saints, by the frequent

acts of Divine love which they then make, by their ardent desire and firm hope of soon possessing God, begin to feel that peace they will afterwards fully enjoy in Heaven. To the Saints death is not a punishment, but a reward.

When he shall give sleep to his beloved, behold the inheritance of the Lord (Ps. cxxvi. 2). The death of the Christian that loves God is called, not *death*, but *sleep*. Thus he shall be able to say: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest* (Ps. iv. 9).

Father Suarez died with so much peace, that in his last moments he exclaimed: "I could never imagine that death would be so sweet." When Cardinal Baronius was advised by his physician not to fix his thoughts so much on death, he said: "Perhaps you think I am afraid of death. I fear it not, but on the contrary, I love it." In going to death for the Faith, the Cardinal of Rochester put on his best clothes, saying that he was going to a nuptial feast. Hence, at the sight of the scaffold he threw away his staff and said: *Ite, pedes; parum a Paradiso distamus! Hasten, O my feet! We are not far from Paradise!* Before death he intoned the "Te Deum," to thank God for giving him the grace to die a Martyr for the holy Faith; and, full of joy, he laid his head on the block.

Ah, my supreme Good, my God, if in the past I have not loved Thee, I now turn to Thee with my whole soul. I take leave of all creatures, and choose Thee, my most amiable Lord, for the sole object of my love. Tell me what Thou wishest of me: I will do all Thou desirest. I have offended Thee enough: I wish to spend all the remaining moments of life in pleasing Thee.

II.

St. Francis of Assisi began to sing at the hour of death and invited his brethren to join with him. Brother Elias said to him: "Father, at death we ought to weep rather than sing." "But," replied the Saint, "I cannot refrain from singing, for I see that I shall soon go to enjoy my God." A young nun of the order of St. Teresa, in her last illness said to her sisters in Religion who stood round her bed bathed in tears: "O God, why do you weep? I go to enjoy my Jesus. If you love me, rejoice with me!"

Father Granada relates that a certain huntsman found a solitary infected with leprosy, singing in his last agony. "How," said he, "can you sing in such a state?" "Brother," replied the hermit,

between me and God there is nothing but the wall of this body. I now see that my flesh is falling off -- that the prison walls will soon be destroyed, and that I shall go to see my God. It is for this reason that I rejoice and sing." The desire of seeing God made St. Ignatius the Martyr say that if the wild beasts should not take away his life he would provoke them to devour him. St. Catherine of Genoa could not bear to hear death called a misfortune. Hence she would say: "Oh, beloved Death, in what mistaken light are you viewed! Why do you not come to me? I call on you night and day!" St. Teresa desired death so vehemently that she regarded as death the continuation of life. Hence she composed the celebrated hymn, *-I die because I do not die*. Such is death to the Saints.

Give me grace, O my God, to compensate by my love for my past ingratitude which has continued to this moment. I deserve to burn in the fire of hell for so many years; Thou hast sought after me, and hast drawn me to Thyself. Make me now burn with the fire of Thy holy love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness! Thou justly claimest all the affections of my heart; for Thou hast loved me more than all others have loved me. Thou alone deservest my love; Thee only do I wish to love. I desire to do everything in my power to please Thee. Do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. For me it is enough to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. Mary, my Mother, assist me. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

6.--ST. POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA

(January 26)

St. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle St. John, and was born about the seventieth year of the Christian Era. He was a Christian from his infancy, and on account of his extraordinary piety was greatly beloved by the Apostles, his teachers. St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, writes that he had had the good fortune, when young, to know our Saint who was then far advanced in years, and remarks how strongly impressed on his mind were the instructions he had received from him, and with what delight he remembered having heard him recount his conversations with St. John and others who had seen the Redeemer.

St. Polycarp was consecrated Bishop of Smyrna by St. John himself before this Apostle's banishment to the Island of Patmos. It is looked upon as certain that our Saint was the *Angel* (or Bishop) of Smyrna, commended by Our Lord in the Apocalypse: *And to the angel of the church of Smyrna write... I know thy tribulation and thy poverty; but thou art rich.... Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life* (Apoc. ii. 9, 10).

Our Saint governed the church of Smyrna seventy years, with so much prudence and authority that he was regarded as the principal of the Asiatic bishops, on account of the great veneration in which he was held. When eighty years of age, he went to Rome to consult with Pope Anicetus on some points of discipline, particularly regarding the time at which Easter should be celebrated. St. Polycarp's delay in Rome was very useful to the faithful, as it afforded him an opportunity of confuting the heresies of that period. He there met the heresiarch, Marcion, who inquired of the holy bishop whether he knew him. "Yes," answered the Saint, "I know thee to be the first-born of the devil."

On his return to Asia, he suffered much in the persecution which the Emperor Marcus Aurelius raised against the Church, and which was particularly felt at Smyrna, where the proconsul, Status Quadratus, was exercising the most barbarous cruelty against the faithful. Amongst other acts of persecution, he caused twelve Christians who were brought from Philadelphia, to be devoured by wild beasts. Excited by this bloodshed, the pagans were loud in their demands for the slaughter of the Christians, particularly Polycarp who failed not on his part to encourage his flock to the most heroic proofs of constancy, in suffering torments and death for Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding the continual clamour raised against him, the Saint wished to remain in the city for the discharge of his pastoral duties, but was obliged, by the importunity of the faithful, to retire to a house without the city, where, during his stay, he occupied the entire night and day in holy prayer.

After a short time, however, he was discovered. Three days previous to his arrest, he saw in a vision his pillow in flames, from which he knew that the Martyrdom reserved for him was that of fire, and, turning to his companions, told them that he

would be burned alive. The Christians, aware that the soldiers were in pursuit of him, removed him to another house; but a young servant, overawed by the fear of torture, revealed the place of his concealment. The Saint was informed of this, but refused to retreat any farther, saying, with holy resignation: "The will of God be done!" Full of heroic zeal, he offered himself to God as a victim destined for His honour, besought Him to accept the sacrifice of his life, and joyfully delivered himself up to his pursuers. He received them into his house, ordered them a handsome supper, and desired only some time for prayer, which being granted, he was for two hours absorbed in meditation.

The captain and soldiers were filled with confusion at the sight of the venerable bishop, and, unwillingly executing their commission, departed with him at break of day. As the journey to Smyrna was long, they set him on an ass, and were conducting him to the city when they met on the road two superior officers, called Herod and Nicetas, who took him into their chariot, and endeavoured to persuade him to obey the imperial edict, saying, among other things: "What wrong is there in sacrificing to the gods in order to save your life?" The Saint answered with fortitude that he would rather suffer every torture, even death itself, than consent to what they advised. Upon this resolute answer they turned away in anger, regarding him as a man lost through his obstinacy, and pushed him from the chariot with such violence that his leg was bruised, or, according to Fleury, broken by the fall.

The Saint, nevertheless, with undisturbed tranquillity of mind, proceeded to the amphitheatre where he was about to sacrifice his life. Upon entering it he heard a voice from Heaven saying: "Be courageous, Polycarp, and act manfully." He was presented to the proconsul who endeavoured to shake his resolution, saying: "Polycarp, thou art old, and should free thyself from torments which thou hast not strength to bear. Swear, therefore, by the fortune of Caesar, and exclaim with the people: 'Be the impious exterminated!' " The Saint immediately replied: "Yes, be the impious exterminated. But by the impious I mean the idolaters!" The proconsul, thinking that he had gained him over, said: "Now blaspheme Jesus Christ, and I will discharge thee."

The Saint rejoined: "I have served Jesus Christ these four score and six years; He never did me harm, but much good; how, then, can I blaspheme Him? How can I blaspheme my Creator and my Saviour, Who is also my Judge, and Who justly punishes those who deny Him?" The tyrant still continuing to tempt him to deny Jesus Christ, Polycarp replied that he was a Christian and considered it a glory to die for Christ.

The proconsul threatened him with wild beasts. "Call for them quickly," replied the Saint; "I cannot turn from good to evil. The beasts will help me to pass from mortal suffering to the glory of Heaven." "Then," said the tyrant, "thou shalt be burned alive." The Saint answered: "Thy fire only lasts a moment; there is another fire which is eternal, and of that I am afraid. Why dost thou delay to execute thy threats?" This he said with so much intrepidity, that the tyrant himself was struck with admiration. He ordered, however, a crier to make public proclamation that Polycarp had avowed himself a Christian; whereupon the entire multitude of pagans cried out: "Let this destroyer of our gods die!" The public shows having terminated, it was resolved that he should be burned alive, instead of being devoured by wild beasts.

The pile was prepared by the pagans, and also by the Jews, who were particularly active in offering themselves as executioners. Polycarp put off his garments, and seeing they were about to fasten him to the stake, said: "Leave aside these nails, He Who gives me fortitude to undergo this fire, will enable me to stand still without them. They therefore contented themselves with tying his hands behind his back, and placed him upon the pile, whence raising his eyes to Heaven, the Saint prayed after the following manner: "I bless Thee, O God, for having vouchsafed to make me a partaker in the Passion of Jesus Christ Thy Son, by rendering me worthy to offer myself as a sacrifice to Thy honour, that I may be enabled to praise Thee in Heaven, and to bless Thee for all eternity." The pile was set on fire, yet the flames did not touch the body of the Saint, but formed, as it were, an arch around him, while his flesh exhaled a most fragrant odour. The pagans, exasperated to see that the fire had no effect, transfixed him with a spear, and such a quantity of blood issued from the wound as to extinguish the flames.

Thus did St. Polycarp terminate his triumph, about the year 160.

Evening Meditation

WE MUST SUFFER EVERYTHING IN ORDER TO PLEASE GOD.

I.

This has been the one chief and dearest endeavour of all the Saints, -- to desire with their whole heart to endure all toil, contempt and pain, in order to please God, and thus to please that Divine Heart which so much deserves to be loved, and loves us so much.

In this consists all perfection, and all the love of a soul for God, to seek always the pleasure of God, and to do that which is most pleasing to Him. Oh, blessed is he who can say with Jesus Christ: *I do always the things that please him* (Jo. viii. 29). And what greater honour, what greater comfort can a soul have than to go through some fatigue, or to accept some labour, believing it to be acceptable to God?

It is more than a duty that we should give pleasure to that God Who has so much loved us, and has given us all that we possess. And not content with giving us so many blessings, He has gone so far as to give Himself for us on the Cross, dying upon it for love of us; and moreover, He instituted the Sacrament of the Altar, where He gives Himself wholly to us in Communion, so that He has no more that He can give.

On this account the Saints knew not what more they could do, in order to give pleasure to God. How many young nobles have left the world in order to give themselves wholly to God! How many young maidens, even of royal blood, have renounced marriage with the great in order to shut themselves up in a cloister! How many anchorites have gone to hide themselves in deserts and caves in order to meditate upon God alone! How many Martyrs have embraced scourges and fiery plates, and the most cruel torments of tyrants, in order to please God! In a word, in order to give pleasure to God, the Saints have stripped themselves of their possessions, have renounced the greatest earthly dignities, and have accepted as treasures infirmities, persecutions, the loss of property, and a death the most painful

and desolate.

II.

The good pleasure of God, therefore, if we truly love it, must be preferred by us to the acquisition of all riches, the loftiest glory, and all the delights of earth and even Paradise itself; for it is certain that all the Blessed, if they were to know that it would please God more that they should burn in hell, -- one and all, even the Mother of God among them, would cast themselves into that abyss of flames, and suffer eternally in order to give greater pleasure to God.

For this end the Lord has placed us in the world, in order that we may devote ourselves to pleasing Him, and giving Him glory. Wherefore the will of God ought to be the one object of all our desires, of all our thoughts and actions. Well does that Heart deserve to be pleased in all things Which has so greatly loved us, and is so anxious for our good.

But how is it, O Lord, that instead of seeking to give Thee pleasure, I have ungratefully displeased Thee so often! Yet the abhorrence which Thou causest me to feel for the sins I have committed against Thee teaches me that Thou dost desire to pardon me. Pardon me, then, and suffer me not to be ungrateful to Thee any longer. Grant that I may conquer everything to give Thee pleasure. *In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever* (Ps. xxx. 2). O Queen of Heaven and my Mother, draw me wholly to God.

Friday--Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT - THE GUILTY SOUL BEFORE ITS JUDGE

We must all be manifested before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. v. 10).

Oh, how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer, and beholds His countenance full of wrath! *Who shall stand before the face of his indignation?* St. Bernard says that the sinful soul will suffer more at seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ than in hell itself.

I.

We must all be manifested before the Judgment seat of Christ.

It is the common opinion of Theologians, that the Particular Judgment takes place at the very moment of death; and that on the very spot where the soul is separated from the body, it is judged by Jesus Christ Who will not send another, but will come Himself to judge it according to its works. *At what hour you think not the Son of man will come* (Luke xii. 40). "He will," says St. Augustine, "come in love to the good, in terror to the wicked." Oh! how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer and His countenance full of wrath! *Who*, says the Prophet Nahum, *shall stand before the face of his indignation?* (i. 6). This thought made Father Louis de Ponte tremble so as to shake the walls of the cell in which he lay. Hearing the *Dies Irae* sung, and reflecting on the terror of the soul when it is presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the Venerable Juvenal Ancina took the resolution of forsaking the world. And this resolution he carried out. The sight of the wrath of the Judge will announce the sentence. *The wrath of the king is as messengers of death* (Prov. xvi. 14). St. Bernard says that the soul will suffer more in seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ than in hell itself. When taken before an earthly judge, criminals have been known to perspire with a cold perspiration. Such was the confusion which Piso felt at the thought of having to appear as a criminal before the Senate, that he killed himself. How great is the pain of a child, or of a vassal, in appearing before an angry parent or an enraged sovereign! Oh, how much greater will be the pain and confusion of the soul when it beholds Jesus Christ enraged against it for the insults it offered to Him during life! *They shall look upon him whom they have pierced* (Jo. xix. 37). The soul will see in wrath the Lamb that bore with it so patiently during life, and that there is no hope of appeasing His anger. This will make the soul call upon the mountains to fall upon it to hide it from the fury of *the wrath of the Lamb* (Apoc. vi. 16). Speaking of Judgment, St. Luke says: *Then they shall see the Son of man* (Luke xxi. 27). Oh! what pain will the sight of the Judge in the form of man excite in the soul of the sinner! The sight of a Man-God Who died for his salvation will upbraid him with his ingratitude.

O my Jesus, I will always call Thee *Jesus*! Thy Name consoles and encourages me, because it reminds me that Thou art my *Saviour* Who didst die for my salvation. Behold me at Thy feet. I acknowledge that I have deserved hell as often as I have offended Thee by mortal sin. I am unworthy of pardon, but Thou hast died to merit pardon for me. Pardon me, then, immediately, O my Jesus, before Thou comest to judge me. I shall not then be able to ask pardon: I can now ask it from Thee, and I hope for it.

II.

When the Saviour ascended into Heaven, the Angels said to the disciples: *This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven* (Acts i. 11).

With the same Wounds with which He ascended into Heaven, Jesus Christ will come to judge the soul. The Wounds of the Redeemer will console the just and terrify the wicked. When Joseph said to his brothers, *I am Joseph, whom you sold*, the Scripture tells us that, through fear, they were silent and unable to utter a word. *His brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear* (Gen. xlv. 3). Now, what answer will the sinner make to Jesus Christ? Will he dare to ask mercy when he must first render an account of his abuse of the mercy he has received? "With what face," says Eusebius Emissenus, "will you, who are to be first judged for contempt of mercy, ask for mercy?" What, then, will become of the sinner? Where, says St. Augustine, will he fly? He will behold an angry Judge above; hell open below; on one side his own sins accusing him; on the other, the devils ready to inflict chastisement; and within, remorse of conscience. "Above shall be an enraged Judge; below, a frightful chaos; on the right, sins accusing him; on the left, the devils dragging him to punishment; within, a burning conscience. Beset in this manner, whither will the sinner fly!"

Thy Wounds, my Jesus, will then fill me with terror, but now they give me confidence. My dear Redeemer, I am sorry above all things for having offended Thy infinite goodness. I purpose to submit to every pain, every loss, rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee with my whole heart. Have pity on me. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy*. O Mary, Mother of Mercy, obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, pardon, and persever-

ance in Divine love. I love thee, O my Queen, and trust in thee.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

7. -- ST. FRUCTUOSUS BISHOP OF TARRAGONA,
AND HIS TWO DEACONS, ST. AUGURIUS AND ST. EU-
LOGIUS.

(January 21)

The Acts of these Martyrs, as found in Ruinart, relate that in the year 259, under the Emperors Valerian and Gallien, Bishop Fructuosus of Tarragona, in Spain, with his two deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, were apprehended by order of Emilian, the governor of the province.

The holy prelate had retired to his room when the soldiers came to arrest him. On hearing the noise he opened the door; and being informed that the governor had summoned him and his two deacons, he said: "We are ready; but if you will permit me, I will put on my shoes." This done, the three Confessors were led to prison.

After six days' imprisonment they were brought before the governor who, turning to Fructuosus, said: "Hast thou heard that which the Emperors have commanded?" The Saint replied: "I know it not; but this I know, that I am a Christian." Emilian: "They have commanded that the gods be honoured." Fructuosus: "For My part, I adore only One God, Who hath made Heaven and earth." Emilian: "Art thou not aware of the existence of the gods?" Fructuosus: "I am not." Emilian: "Shortly thou shalt be. To what will men render homage, if they adore not the gods and the images of the emperors?" Then turning to Augurius, the deacon, he said: "Give no ear to the words of Fructuosus." Augurius replied: "I adore One Omnipotent God." The governor then turned to Eulogius and said: "Perhaps thou also adorest Fructuosus?" The deacon replied: "No; I adore him not; but I adore the same God Whom he worships." The governor, then turning to Fructuosus, asked him: "Art thou the bishop?" The Saint replied: "Yes, I am." Emilian said: "Thou shouldst have rather said: 'I have been,' for thou shalt be so no longer. I condemn you all three to the flames."

Whilst St. Fructuosus and his deacons were being led to the

amphitheatre to undergo their sentence, the people, moved to compassion for the venerable bishop who was beloved not only by the faithful, but even by the idolaters, presented him a cup, requesting him to drink and be strengthened; but he refused, saying, that it was not yet the hour for breaking the fast.* When they arrived at the amphitheatre, the Saint appeared filled with a tranquil joy. His Lector, Augustalis, came to him weeping, and begged he would permit him to take off his shoes. "No, my son," replied the holy bishop, "allow me to take them off myself; for the certainty which I have of the Divine promises gives me sufficient strength." Having taken off his shoes, one of the faithful took him by the hand and desired he would remember him in his prayers. The Saint replied: "I am bound to pray for the whole Catholic Church from East to West." By these words, as St. Augustine observes, he wished to signify that each one of the faithful becomes a participator in all the prayers of the Church.

*This fast, called *The Fast of the Stations*, was kept on Wednesdays and Fridays. It was not broken till about three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was then ten o'clock in the morning. -- ED.

When he was about to receive the crown of Martyrdom he raised his voice, as the Acts relate, and said to the Christians: "Be not afraid; you shall not be left without a pastor, for the love and the promises of the Lord never fail. That which you see me now about to suffer is the pain only of an hour." Having said these words, he was, together with his companions, encircled with fire; but the Lord so disposed it, that the flames consumed only the bands with which their hands were tied; wherefore, being at liberty to stretch forth their arms, they prostrated themselves in prayer, and raising their hands to Heaven besought the Almighty to allow the fire to consume them, that their sacrifice might be completed. The Lord vouchsafed to hear their prayers, and placidly expiring, they went to receive the reward of their Martyrdom.

After their death, God was pleased to glorify His servants by manifesting their triumph to two Christians, Babylas and Mygdone, domestics of the governor. These saw the heavens open, and St. Fructuosus between his two deacons, surrounded with a halo of glory and ascending to receive their crowns. They called

Emilianus to witness the ascent into Heaven of those whom he had that day condemned; but he was unworthy of the heavenly vision.

The faithful, who were exceedingly afflicted at the death of their pastor, came in the night to the amphitheatre, extinguished the smouldering remains of the fire, and were carrying away the bones of the Martyrs; the holy bishop appeared to them, and commanded that all the relics should be buried together.

The Acts of these Martyrs terminate with the following devout aspiration: "O Blessed Martyrs, like gold, they have been tried in the furnace, and found worthy a crown of everlasting glory! To this crown their example invites us also!" St. Augustine, in a sermon delivered on the Anniversary of these Martyrs, observes that from the fact that they have attained to such glory, although being men of the same condition that we are, we should hope to overcome all the obstacles to our salvation, through the grace of Jesus Christ Who can render that easy which our weakness looks upon as insuperable.

Evening Meditation

"HE WAS OFFERED BECAUSE IT WAS HIS OWN WILL."

(Is. liii. 7)

I.

The Incarnate Word, at the moment of His conception, saw before Him all the souls He was to redeem. Then thou also, my soul, wast presented with the guilt of all thy sins upon thee, and for thee did Jesus Christ accept all the pains that He suffered in life and death; and in doing so He obtained for thee thy pardon and all the graces thou hast received from God -- the lights, the calls of His love, the helps to overcome temptations, the spiritual consolations, the tears, the compassionate feelings thou hast experienced when thinking of the love He had for thee, and the sentiments of sorrow in remembering how thou hast offended Him.

Thou didst, then, my Jesus, from the very beginning of Thy life, take upon Thee all my sins, and didst offer Thyself to satisfy for them by Thy sufferings. By Thy death Thou didst deliver me from eternal death: *But thou hast delivered my soul, that it should not perish; thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back* (Is. xxxviii. 17).

Thou, my Love, instead of punishing me for the insults which I have added to those that Thou hadst already received, hast gone on adding to Thy favours and mercies towards me, in order to win my heart one day to Thyself. My Jesus, this day has come; I now love Thee with all my soul. Who should love Thee if I do not? This is the first sin, my Jesus, that Thou hast to forgive me, that I have been so many years in the world without loving Thee. But for the future I will do all I can to please Thee. By Thy grace I feel a great desire to live for Thee alone, and to detach myself from all created things. I have also a great sorrow for the displeasure I have caused Thee. This desire and this sorrow, O my Jesus, are all Thy gift. Continue, then, my Love, to keep me faithful in Thy love, for Thou knowest my weakness. Make me all Thine as Thou hast made Thyself all mine. I love Thee, my only Good; I love Thee, my only Love; I love Thee, my Treasure, my All; my Jesus, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee. Help me, O Mother of God.

II.

Behold, my Redeemer, to what Thy love for men has brought Thee -- even to dying of sorrow on a Cross, drowned in a sea of grief and ignominy, as David had predicted of Thee. *I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me* (Ps. lxxviii. 3). St. Francis de Sales writes thus: "Let us contemplate this Divine Saviour stretched on the Cross as upon the Altar of His Glory, on which He is dying of love for us. Ah, why, then, do we not in spirit throw ourselves upon Him to die upon the Cross with Him Who has chosen to die there for the love of us? I will hold Him, we ought to say, -- I will never let Him go. I will die with Him and will burn in the flames of His love. One and the same fire shall devour this Divine Creator and his miserable creature. My Jesus is all mine, and I am all His. I will live and die on His bosom. Neither life nor death shall ever separate me from my Jesus."

Yes, my dear Redeemer, I hold fast to Thy Cross. Touched with compassion I kiss Thy pierced feet. I am confounded, O Lord Jesus, at seeing the affection with which Thou hast died for me. Ah, accept me, and bind me to Thy feet that I may no more depart from Thee, and may from this day forward converse with

Thee alone, and to Thee confide all my thoughts. In a word, may I henceforth so direct all my affections as to seek nothing but to love Thee and please Thee, always longing to leave this valley of dangers to go love Thee face to face with all my strength in Thy kingdom which is a kingdom of eternal love. In the meantime let me always live in sorrow for the offences I have committed against Thee, and always burning with love for Thee Who for love of me hast given Thy life. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who hast died for me. I love Thee, O infinite Lover. I love Thee, O infinite Love. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness. O Mary, Mother of beautiful love, pray to my Jesus for me.

Saturday--Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

MARY IS THE HOPE OF ALL.

There is no sinner, however abandoned by God, for whom Mary will not obtain grace and mercy if he only invokes her aid. As the magnet attracts iron so she draws to herself and to God the hardest hearts. Oh, if sinners had only recourse to Mary with a determination to amend their lives who should ever be lost!

I.

Denis the Carthusian says that Mary is, in a special manner, the advocate of sinners, because the guilty stand in greater need of succour than the innocent; hence he calls her the advocate of all sinners who invoke her intercession. And before him, St. John Damascene called Mary "the city of refuge for all who fly to her." Hence St. Bonaventure says: "Poor abandoned sinners, do not despair, raise your eyes to Mary," and be comforted, trusting in the clemency of this good Mother, for she will rescue you from the shipwreck you have suffered and will conduct you to the haven of salvation. Let us, then, say with St. Thomas of Villanova: "O holy Virgin, since thou art the advocate of the miserable, assist us who are the most miserable of all." "Let us," says St. Bernard, "ask grace, and ask it through Mary." The grace that we have lost she has found, says Richard of St. Laurence; we, then, should go to her in order to recover it. When the Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that God had chosen her to be the Mother of the Word, he said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou*

hast found grace with God (Luke i. 30). But how can that be? Mary was never deprived of grace; on the contrary, she was always *full of grace*. How, then, could the Angel say that she had *found grace*? Cardinal Hugo answers, that she did not find grace for herself, because she always possessed it, but she found it for us who had miserably lost it. Hence he says that in order to recover it, we should go to Mary and say to her: O Lady, property should be restored to him who has lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine, for thou didst always possess it; it is ours, we have lost it; to us, then, thou shouldst restore it. "Sinners, who by sin have forfeited the Divine grace, run, run to the Virgin, and say to her with confidence: Restore to us our property which you have found."

Oh, if all sinners had recourse to Mary with a determination to amend their lives, who should ever be lost? They that have not recourse to Mary are lost. St. Bridget heard our Saviour say to His Mother: "You would show mercy even to the devil were he to ask it with humility." The proud Lucifer will never humble himself so far as to recommend himself to Mary; but were he to humble himself to this Divine Mother and ask her aid, she would not cast him off, but would deliver him from hell by her intercession. By this Jesus gives us to understand that Mary obtains salvation for all that have recourse to her.

II.

St. Basil calls Mary "a public hospital." Public hospitals are established for the poor that are afflicted with sickness, and the greater the poverty of the invalid, the stronger his claim to admission. Hence, according to St. Basil, Mary would receive with the greatest promptness the most abandoned sinners that have recourse to her. Ah! says St. Bernard, this great Queen feels no horror for any sinner, however great the stench of his sins. If the miserable man flies to her protection, she disdains not to stretch forth her hand and to rescue him from the state of perdition. Our Lord revealed to St. Catherine of Sienna, that He had chosen Mary to draw men, and particularly sinners, to His love. Mary herself said to St. Bridget, that there is no sinner, however abandoned by God, for whom, if he invoke her aid, she will not obtain the grace to return to God, and find mercy. She also said

that as the magnet attracts iron, so she draws to herself and to God the hardest hearts.

The holy Church wishes that we call this Divine Mother our Hope. *Hail, our Hope!* The impious Luther said that he could not bear to hear the Church teaching us to call Mary *our Hope*. God only, he said, is our Hope; and God Himself curses them that place their hopes in any creature. Yes, God curses those that trust in creatures independently of Him, but we hope in Mary as a mediatrix with God. For, says St. Bernard, God has placed in the hands of Mary all the treasures of goods that He wishes to dispense to men. Hence the Lord wishes us to acknowledge that all good comes from Mary; for He has ordained that all the graces that He will give us should pass through her hands. St. Bernard called her his greatest confidence, and the entire ground of his hope. St. Bonaventure called Mary the salvation of them who invoke her. Hence according to St. Bonaventure, to be saved it is enough to invoke Mary. Whenever, then, the devil terrifies us with the fear of being lost, let us say to Mary with the same Saint: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever!" In thee, after Jesus, I have placed all my hopes; thou hast to watch over my salvation, and to deliver me from hell. But, says St. Anselm, hell is not the lot of any true client of Mary for whom she prays even once, and says to her Son that she desires his salvation.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

8. -- ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, ARCHBISHOP OF
CONSTANTINOPLE

(January 27)

Although this great Saint did not actually die for the Faith at the hands of the executioner, yet he may be styled a Martyr, as he died of the maltreatment which he received defending God's honour and the rights of the Church.

St. John was born at Antioch about the year 347, and was descended from one of the most illustrious families of that city. His mother, being left a widow at the early age of twenty years, took particular care of the education of her two children, placing John under the most eminent masters, to study rhetoric and

philosophy.* It was expected that the pious youth would attain to great worldly fortune; but from his twentieth year he applied himself to the study of the Sacred Scriptures and to prayer, and dedicated himself entirely to the service of his crucified Lord. Whereupon St. Meletius, his bishop, took a great liking to him, and having instructed him for three years, made him Lector of his own church.

*His mother, Anthusa, did not wish to marry again in order to devote herself entirely to the welfare of her children. She herself took care to instil into them the great principles of our holy Religion. "Never," says Alban Butler, "was a woman more worthy of bearing the name of mother." The pagans themselves could not help admiring her virtues; and a celebrated philosopher cried out while speaking of her: "What wonderful women are to be found amongst the Christians!"

Although during his stay in Antioch he led a very retired and mortified life, he bethought himself of the advantages of a still more solitary and austere state; and consequently retired to a cave where he passed some years in continual prayer and penitential practices, which were so severe as to injure his health. He was therefore obliged to return to Antioch, where he was ordained deacon by St. Meletius, whose successor, Flavianius, conferred upon him the Holy Order of Priesthood five years afterwards. In consequence of his great eloquence, the Bishop appointed him preacher of that church. This office he discharged so well, that public demonstrations of approbation were frequently made, against which the Saint protested, saying: "What good can these your applauses do me? That only which I desire is that you practise what I preach, -- this will be to me the most acceptable applause."

Nectarius, Patriarch of Constantinople, died in the year 397; and as the name of our Saint had obtained great celebrity throughout the entire Province, the Emperor Arcadius, the clergy and people, agreed in having him promoted to that see. The emperor accordingly summoned him to Constantinople, and without making known to him his design, took him into his carriage, and brought him to a church outside the city, where, notwithstanding his reluctance, he was consecrated by the bish-

ops previously assembled.

The see of Constantinople had unfortunately been governed for sixteen years by Nectarius, a man without learning or zeal; so that this great city, containing as it did so many strangers and heretics, required a thorough reform. To this St. John Chrysostom gave his entire attention. With an untiring and holy zeal he laboured for the reformation of his clergy, and endeavoured to suppress the avarice and haughtiness of the emperor's court; this made for him many enemies.

It happened that there arrived at Constantinople some monks, who had been expelled from Egypt by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, under the pretext of Origenism; but St. John, being convinced of their innocence, wrote to Theophilus in their favour, beseeching him not to disturb them. He, however, being a haughty and vindictive man, succeeded in raising a persecution against the Saint for protecting the monks. The emperor, however, summoned Theophilus to Constantinople, to account for his conduct; but he easily gained over to his side the nobles, bishops, and clergy, who were opposed to St. Chrysostom. But the greatest acquisition to his party was the Empress Eudoxia who bore a mortal enmity to our Saint, on account of having been rebuked by him for her avaricious rapacity in depriving Callitropa of her money and another widow of her land. Backed by this party, Theophilus was enabled to get together a cabal of thirty-six bishops, who from the place where they met styled themselves the *Synod of the Oak*, and having drawn up some false accusations, deposed St. John from his bishopric, and obtained from the emperor a decree for his banishment.

The people, hearing of the decree, surrounded the church to defend their bishop; but St. John, to avoid a sedition, escaped through a private door, and surrendered himself to the guards, who brought him to Bithynia. On the night of the following day Constantinople was shaken with an earthquake, which was regarded by all, even by Eudoxia, as a sign of God's displeasure. In the greatest consternation she besought the emperor to recall the holy bishop. The entire population went out to meet him, chanting hymns, and bearing lighted torches in their hands, and having arrived at the Cathedral put him upon the episcopal

throne.

Theophilus and his party having fled from Constantinople, the Saint resumed the discharge of his pastoral duties, and was treating with the emperor about the convocation of a council to vindicate his innocence, when a certain incident totally changed the aspect of affairs. In the square before the great church of St. Sophia a silver statue had been erected to the empress, where dances and public games were performed, which disturbed the sacred offices of the church. The Saint strongly rebuked the people for this irreverence; but his zeal only infuriated the Empress Eudoxia, who to satisfy her revenge availed herself of the enmity which Theophilus and other bishops bore our Saint. They formed a second cabal, in which they condemned and deposed St. Chrysostom, under pretext that he had reassumed the episcopal function without having justified himself in synod.

In pursuance of this most iniquitous deposition, an order came from the emperor that he should not enter his church, and he accordingly departed from the city. As this happened on Holy Saturday, the Saint retired to a country chapel, in order to celebrate the sacred offices; but his enemies obtained a troop of four hundred soldiers, and entered the church, where Baptism was being administered, wounded some of the priests, and injured some of the children who were about to be baptized. Their sacrilegious impiety went so far as to trample on the Blessed Sacrament! Such, in fine, was the consternation, that many of the people ran to hide themselves in the woods and valleys.

Although the Emperor Arcadius had no personal enmity to St. John, he was induced by the importunity of his wife and the hostile bishops to send him into banishment. The Saint having received the order, took leave of the bishops who were his friends, and departing through a private door, delivered himself to the soldiers who obliged him to travel day and night on the journey into Armenia, the place of his banishment. The journey lasted seventy days, during thirty of which the Saint suffered from a tertian fever.

When they arrived the bishop received St. John into his house. He there found some repose after so much suffering. The Saint here did not remain idle, but employed himself, as much

as possible, in instructing the people and relieving the poor. He also wrote many letters to console his friends, and to assist the churches which had been lately founded in Persia and Phoenicia.

Meanwhile, Pope Innocent I. having been informed of the injustice done to St. John, did all in his power to assemble a synod where the innocence of the Saint would be definitely declared. But his enemies laboured successfully to prevent a synod being held; and jealous also of the fame he was acquiring in his first place of exile, prevailed upon Arcadius to banish him to Pytius, a small town on the borders of the empire. St. John was accordingly consigned to two officers, one of whom was a most brutal man, who being instructed by the enemies of the Saint to cause his death by maltreatment on the road, obliged him to travel in the most violent rains and amid scorching heats, not allowing him to rest in any town, but halting at obscure villages, where no accommodation could be found.

When they arrived at Comana, in Pontus, the inhuman officer obliged him to continue his journey five or six miles to the church where St. Basiliscus, Martyr and Bishop of Comana, had been buried; they lodged in a house contiguous to the church, and in the night the holy Martyr appeared to St. John, and exhorted him to have courage, adding: "tomorrow we shall be together." St. Chrysostom, knowing thus that the termination of his sufferings was at hand, besought the soldiers to defer their departure till the morrow. This he could not obtain; but they had travelled only a few miles when, seeing the Saint about to expire, they returned to the same house. The Saint then changed his dress, putting on a white robe. He received the holy Viaticum, and poured forth his last prayer, which he concluded with the words he was constantly in the habit of using: "Glory be to God for all things!" Having said "Amen," he gave up his soul to God, on the 14th September in the year 407, being about sixty years of age, and having been bishop nine years and seven months. A great concourse of monks and persons of rank came from the neighbouring provinces to celebrate his funeral.

God did not delay the punishment of his enemies, and especially of Eudoxia, who died a few days afterwards. She was soon followed by Arcadius, who expired in his thirty-first year, and

these deaths have generally been considered the effects of divine wrath.

In the year 428, the honours of a Saint were first given to St. John Chrysostom, and the archbishop, St. Proculus, afterwards persuaded the emperor, Theodosius the Younger, to bring the Saint's body from Comana to Constantinople. The translation of the sacred relics was performed with the utmost pomp, the entire population going forth to join in the procession. The sea over which they passed was covered with barges, and illuminated with torches. When the sacred relics arrived, the Emperor Theodosius, his eyes bathed in tears and fixed upon the coffin, humbly asked pardon of the Saint for the injustice done to him by his parents. This translation took place on the 28th of January, in the year 438, thirty-one years after the Saint's death. The relics were in later times translated to Rome and placed in St. Peter's.

Evening Meditation

JUDGMENT AFTER DEATH

I.

It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment (Heb. ix. 27).

It is of Faith that, immediately after death we shall be judged according to our works in this life. And it is also of Faith, that upon this Judgment will depend our eternal salvation or perdition. Imagine yourself in your agony, and having only a short time to live. Think that in a short time you would have to appear before Jesus Christ to give an account of your whole life. Alas! how alarming would the sight of your sins then be to you!

Jesus, my Redeemer, pardon me, I beseech Thee, before Thou judgest me. I know that I have many times already deserved to be sentenced to eternal death. No, I desire not to present myself guilty before Thee, but penitent and pardoned. O my sovereign Good, I am grievously sorry for having offended Thee.

O God, what will be the anguish of the soul when it shall first behold Jesus Christ as its Judge, and behold Him terrible in His wrath? It will then see how much He has suffered for its sake; it will see what great mercies He has exercised towards it, and what powerful means He has bestowed upon it for the attainment of salvation; then will it also see the greatness of eternal

goods, and the vileness of earthly pleasures which have wrought its ruin; it will then see all these things but to no purpose, because then there will be no more time to correct its past errors. What shall have then been done will be irrevocable. Before the Judgment-seat of God, no nobility, nor dignity, nor riches will be considered; our works alone will be weighed there.

Grant, O Jesus, that when first I behold Thee I may see Thee appeased; and for this end, grant me the grace to weep during the remainder of my life, over the evil I have done in turning my back upon Thee to follow my own sinful caprices. No, I desire never more to offend Thee. I love Thee and desire to love Thee forever.

II.

What contentment will that Christian enjoy at the hour of death who has left the world to give himself to God; who has denied his senses all unlawful gratifications; and who, if he has on some occasions been wanting, has at last been wise enough afterwards to do worthy penance for it! On the other hand, what anguish will that Christian experience who has continually relapsed into the same vices, and at last finds himself at the point of death! Then will he exclaim: "Alas! in a few moments I must appear before Jesus, my Judge, and I have not yet even begun to change my life! I have many times promised to do so, but I have not done it. Now in a short time, what shall become of me?"

O, my Jesus and my Judge, I return Thee thanks for the patience with which Thou hast hitherto waited for me. How many times have I not written my own condemnation! Since Thou hast thus waited to pardon me, reject me not now that I am prostrate at Thy feet. Receive me into Thy favour through the merits of Thy bitter Passion. I am sorry, O my sovereign Good, for having despised Thee. I love Thee above all things. I desire never more to forsake Thee.

O Mary, recommend me to thy Son, Jesus, and do not abandon me.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"GATHER UP FIRST THE COCKLE, AND BIND IT INTO BUNDLES TO BURN."-- (Gospel of Sunday. Matt. xiii. 24, 30)

Behold the final doom of sinners who abuse the Divine Mercy, -- to burn in the fire of hell! God threatens hell, not that He may send us there, but in order that He may deliver us from that place of torments. Oh, how ardently would the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me!

I.

In committing sin the sinner does two evils. He abandons God, the Sovereign Good, and turns to creatures. *For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns - broken cisterns - that can hold no water* (Jer. ii. 13). Since, then, by turning to creatures the sinner offends God, he will be justly tortured in hell by the same creatures, by fire and by devils. In this punishment consists the pain of sense. But because his greatest guilt and the malice of his sin consists in turning his back on God, his principal torment, his hell, will be the pain of loss, or the pain arising from having lost God.

It is of Faith, that there is a hell -- a prison reserved for the chastisement of rebels against God. What is this hell? It is what the glutton who was damned called *a place of torments* (Luke xvi. 28). A place of torments where all the senses and powers of the damned will have their own particular torment, and where, the more a person has offended God by any sense, the more he will be tortured in that sense. *By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented* (Wis. xi. 17). *As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torments and sorrow give ye to her* (Apoc. xviii. 7). The sight will be tormented with darkness. *A land, says Job, that is dark, and covered with the mist of death* (Job x. 21). How pitiable is the condition of a man shut up in a dark pit for forty or fifty years, or during his whole life! Hell is a dungeon closed up on every side, into which a ray of sun, or of any other light, shall never enter. *He shall never see the light* (Ps. xlviii. 20). The fire of this world sends forth light, but the fire of hell is

utterly dark. *The voice of the Lord divided the fire* (Ps. xxviii. 7). In explaining these words, St. Basil says, that the Lord will separate the light from the fire, so that this fire will burn, but will not illuminate. Albert the Great expounds them more briefly, and says that God "will divide the flame from the heat." The very smoke that issues from that fire shall form a storm of darkness which, according to St. Jude, will blind the damned. *To whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever* (Jude 13). St. Thomas teaches that the damned have only the light which serves to increase their torments. In that glimmering light they will see the deformity of their associates, and of the devils who will assume horrible forms in order to increase the terrors of the damned.

Ah, my Lord, behold at Thy feet one who has so much despised Thy grace and Thy chastisements! Miserable should I be, O my Jesus, if Thou hadst not taken pity on me. How many years should I be in that fetid furnace, in which so many of my companions are now burning! Ah, my Redeemer, why does not this thought make me burn with Thy love? How can I ever again think of offending Thee? Ah, my Jesus, may I never more displease Thee! Strike me dead a thousand times rather than permit me ever again to insult Thee. Since Thou hast begun, complete the work. Thou hast taken me out of the abyss of so many sins, and hast so lovingly called me to love Thee.

II.

The sense of smell will also be tormented. How painful to be confined in a close room along with a putrid corpse! *Out of their carcasses*, says the Prophet Isaias, *shall rise a stink* (Is. xxxiv. 3). The damned must remain in the midst of so many millions of the reprobate, who, though ever living and in pain, are called carcasses on account of the stench which they send forth. St. Bonaventure says that if the body of one of the damned were placed on this earth, it would, by its stench, be sufficient to cause the death of all men. And yet some will say: *If I am damned I shall not be alone*. Miserable fools! The greater the number of the damned in hell, the more insufferable will be their torments. "There," says St. Thomas, "the society of the reprobate will cause not a diminution, but an increase of misery." Their sufferings are more intolerable on account of the stench, on account of the

shrieks of the damned, and on account of the narrowness of the place. In hell they will be one over the other, like sheep gathered together in the winter. *They are*, said David, *laid in hell like sheep* (Ps. xlviii. 15). They will be even like grapes pressed under the wine-press of God's wrath. *And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty* (Apoc. xix. 15). From this will arise the pain of immobility. *Let them become immovable as a stone* (Exod. xv. 16). Thus, in whatsoever position the damned will fall into hell after the Last Day, in that position they must remain, without ever changing and without ever being able to move hand or foot, as long as God shall be God.

The sense of hearing will be tormented by the ceaseless howling and wailing of those miserable beings who are sunk in an abyss of despair. The devils will torment the damned by continual noises. *The sound of dread is always in his ears* (Job xv. 21). How painful to a person longing for sleep to hear the groans of a sick man, the barking of a dog, or the screams of an infant! But, oh, how miserable the condition of the damned who must listen incessantly for all eternity to the clamour and cries of the companions of their torments! The damned will be tormented by a ravenous hunger. *They shall suffer hunger like dogs* (Ps. lviii. 15). But they never shall have a morsel of bread. Their thirst will be so great that all the waters of the ocean would not be able to quench it; but they shall never be allowed a single drop. The rich glutton asked for a drop of water but he has not yet had it, and he never, never shall.

Ah, grant, my Jesus, that I may give to Thee all the time Thou now givest to me. How ardently would the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me! And shall I continue to spend it in offending Thee? No, my Jesus, through the merits of that Blood which has hitherto delivered me from hell, do not permit it. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. I wish never more to offend Thee, but to love Thee forever. Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me, and obtain for me the gift of perseverance and of His holy love.

Spiritual Reading

"BIND INTO BUNDLES TO BURN." THE FIRE OF HELL

The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms (Ecclus. vii. 19).

Fire and the remorse of conscience are the principal means by which God takes vengeance on the flesh of the wicked. Hence, in condemning the reprobate to hell, Jesus Christ commands them to go into eternal fire. *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire* (Matt. xxv. 41). This fire, then, shall be one of the most cruel executioners of the damned.

Even in this life the pain of fire is the most terrible of all torments. But St. Augustine says, that compared with the fire of hell, the fire of this earth is no more than a *picture* compared with the reality. St. Anselm teaches that the fire of hell as far surpasses the fire of this world, as real fire exceeds painted fire. The pain, then, produced by the fire of hell is far greater than that which is produced by our fire, because God has made the fire of this earth for man's use, but He has created the fire of hell purposely for the chastisement of sinners; and therefore, as Tertullian says, He has made it a minister of His justice. This avenging fire is always kept alive by the wrath of God. *A fire is kindled in my rage* (Jer. xv. 14).

And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell (Luke, xvi. 22). The damned are buried in the fire of hell. Hence they have an abyss of fire below, an abyss of fire above, and an abyss of fire on every side. As fishes in the sea are surrounded by water, so the unhappy reprobates are encompassed by fire on every side. The sharpness of the pain of fire may be inferred from the circumstance that the rich glutton complained of no other torment. *I am tormented in this flame* (Luke xvi. 24).

The Prophet Isaias says that the Lord will punish the guilt of sinners with the *spirit of fire*. *If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion... by the spirit of burning* (Is. iv. 4). The spirit of burning is the pure essence of fire. All spirits or essences, though taken from simple herbs or flowers, are so penetrating that they reach the very bone. Such is the fire of hell. Its activity is so great that a single spark of it would be sufficient to melt a mountain of bronze. The Disciple relates, that a damned person, who ap-

peared to a Religious, dipped his hand into a vessel of water; the Religious placed in the vessel a candlestick of bronze and it was instantly dissolved.

This fire shall torment the damned not only externally, but also internally. It will burn the bowels, the heart, the brain, the blood within the veins, and the marrow within the bones. The skin of the damned shall be like a caldron, in which their bowels, their flesh, and their bones shall be burned. David says that the bodies of the damned shall be like so many furnaces of fire. *Thou shalt make them as an oven of fire in the time of thy anger* (Ps. xx. 10).

O God, certain sinners cannot bear to walk under a strong sun, or to remain before a large fire in a close room; they cannot endure a spark from a candle; and they fear not the fire of hell, which, according to the Prophet Isaias, not only *burns* but *devours* the unhappy damned. *Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?* (Is. xxxiii. 14). As a lion devours a lamb, so the fire of hell devours the reprobate; but it devours without destroying life, and thus tortures them with a continual death. Continue, says St. Peter Damien to the sinner who indulges in impurity, continue to satisfy your flesh; a day will come, or rather an eternal night, when your impurities, like pitch, shall nourish a fire within your very bowels. And according to St. Cyprian, the impurities of the wicked shall boil in the very fat which will issue from their accursed bodies.

St. Jerome teaches that in this fire sinners shall suffer not only the pain of the fire, but also all the pains which men endure on this earth. How manifold are the pains to which men are subject in this life! Pains in the side, pains in the head, pains in the loins, pains in the bowels. All these together torture the damned.

Evening Meditation

LET US LABOUR FOR ETERNITY.

I.

Be ye ready: for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come (Luke xii. 40).

The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well; to die well and happily, we must prepare ourselves beforehand. There will not be time then to eradicate bad habits from the soul, to expel from the heart its predominant passions,

and to extinguish all affection for earthly goods. *The night cometh when no man can work* (Jo. ix. 4). In death all will be night, when nothing will be seen, and hence, nothing done. The heart hardened, the mind obscured, confusion, fear, the desire of health, will render it almost impossible at the hour of death to set in order a conscience confused and entangled in sin.

O Sacred Wounds of my Redeemer, I adore you, I humbly kiss you, and I confide in you.

The Saints thought they did but little, though they spent their whole lives in preparing for death by acts of penance, prayer, and the practice of good works, and they trembled when they came to die. The Blessed John of Avila, although he had led a very holy life from his youth, when it was announced to him that he was about to die, made answer and said: "Oh that I had a little more time to prepare myself for death!" And what shall we say when the summons of death shall be brought to us?

No, my God, I do not wish to die disquieted and ungrateful, as at present I should die, if death were to overtake me now. I desire to change my life, I desire to bewail my offences against Thee, I desire to love Thee with my whole heart. O Lord, help me, enable me to do something for Thee before I die, -- for Thee Who hast died for the love of me.

II.

The time is short (1 Cor. vii. 29), says the Apostle. Yes, we have but a short time in which to set our accounts in order. Hence the Holy Ghost admonishes us: *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it quickly* (Eccles. ix. 10). Whatever thou art able to do today, put it not off till tomorrow; for today is passing away, and tomorrow may bring death which will deprive thee of all means of doing good, or of amending what thou hast done amiss. Woe to me, if death shall find me still attached to this world!

Ah, my God, how many years have I lived at a distance from Thee! And how hast Thou had so much patience with me, in waiting for me and in calling me so often to repentance! I thank Thee, O my Redeemer, for Thy long forbearance, and I hope to thank Thee for it forever in Heaven. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever* (Ps. lxxxviii. 2). Hitherto I have not loved Thee, and have made little account of being loved or not being loved by

Thee, but now I do love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee above all things, more than I love myself, and I desire nothing so much as to be loved by Thee. And recollecting how I have despised Thy love I would willingly die of grief for having done so. Mary, my holy Mother, obtain for me the happiness of being faithful to God.

Monday--Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"SEEK YE THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND."

It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted, God promises pardon to him. But God has not promised that sinners will be converted at death. On the contrary, He has often protested that they who live in sin will die in sin. *Therefore, seek ye the Lord while He may be found* (Is. lv. 6).

I.

God unceasingly threatens sinners with an unhappy death. *Then shall they 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). According to St. Gregory, God laughs when He is unwilling to show mercy. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time* (Deut. xxxii. 35). The Lord pronounces the same threats in many other places; and yet sinners live in peace as securely as if God had certainly promised to give them at death, pardon and Paradise! It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted, God promises to pardon him. But He has not promised that sinners will be converted at death. On the contrary, He has often protested that they who live in sin shall die in sin. *You shall die in your sins* (Jo. viii. 21, 24). He has declared that they who shall seek Him at death, shall not find Him. *You shall seek me, and shall not find me* (Jo. vii. 34). We must, therefore, seek God while He may be found. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found* (Is. lv. 6). A time shall come when it will not be in your power to find Him. Poor blind sinners! They put off their conversion till death, when there will be no more time for repentance. "The wicked," says Oleaster, "never learn to do good, except when the time for doing good is no more." God wills the salvation of all, but He takes

vengeance on obstinate sinners.

Should any man in the state of sin be seized with apoplexy and be deprived of his senses, what sentiments of compassion would be excited in all who should see him die without the Sacraments and without signs of repentance! And how great would be their delight did he recover his senses, ask for absolution, and make acts of sorrow for his sins! But is not he a fool who has time to repent and prefers to continue in sin? Or who returns to sin and exposes himself to the danger of being cut off by death without the Sacraments and without repentance? A sudden death excites terror in all; and still how many expose themselves to the danger of dying suddenly, and of dying in sin. *Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord* (Prov. xvi. 11). We keep no account of the graces which God bestows upon us; but He keeps an account of them. He measures them, and when He sees them despised to a certain degree, He then abandons the sinner to his sin, and takes him out of life in that unhappy state. Miserable the man who defers his conversion till death! "The repentance which is sought," says St. Augustine, "from an infirm man is infirm." St. Jerome teaches, that of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till death, scarcely one shall be saved. St. Vincent Ferrer writes that it is a greater miracle to bring such sinners to salvation than to raise the dead to life.

Ah, my God, who would have borne with me so patiently as Thou hast? If Thy goodness were not infinite, I should despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God Who has died for my salvation. Thou didst command me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins terrify and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises encourage me. Thou hast promised the life of Thy grace to all who return to Thee. *Return ye and live* (Ezech. xviii. 32). Thou hast promised to embrace him who is converted to Thee. *Turn ye to me and I will turn to you* (Zach. i. 3). Thou hast said that Thou knowest not how to despise a humble and contrite heart.

II.

What sorrow for sin, what repentance can be expected at death from the man who has till that moment loved sin? Bel-larmine relates that when he exhorted to contrition a certain dying person he was assisting, the dying man said that he did not

know what was meant by contrition. The holy man endeavoured to explain it to him; but he said: "Father, I do not understand you; these things are too high for me." He died in that state, leaving, as the venerable Cardinal has written, "sufficiently evident signs of his damnation." St. Augustine says, that by a just chastisement, the sinner who has forgotten God during life, shall forget himself at death.

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 a mockery of God to live in contempt of His laws, and afterwards to reap remuneration and eternal glory. But, *God is not mocked!* What we sow in this life we reap in the next. For him who sows the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, nothing remains but corruption, misery, and eternal death.

Beloved Christian, what is said for others is also applicable to you. Tell me: if you were at the point of death, given over by the physicians, deprived of your senses, and in your last agony, with what fervour would you ask of God another month or week, to settle the affairs of your conscience! God gives you this time now. Thank Him for it, and apply an immediate remedy to the evil you have done. Adopt all the means of finding yourself in the grace of God when death shall come; for then there shall be no more time to acquire His friendship.

Behold, O Lord, I return to Thee and acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells! I am sorry for having offended Thee. I firmly promise never again to offend Thee voluntarily, and to love Thee forever. Ah, do not suffer me to be ungrateful any longer for such goodness. O Eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Jesus Christ, Who died to obey Thee, grant that I may till death be obedient to all Thy will. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and through the love which I bear Thee, I desire to obey Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love, I ask for nothing more. Mary, my Mother, intercede for me.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

9. -- ST. IGNATIUS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH

(February 1)

St. Ignatius, also called Theophorus, that is, *one who carries God*, lived in the First Century of the Church. He was a disciple of the Apostles, particularly of St. John; by them he was baptized, and subsequently ordained Bishop of the Church of Antioch which had the honour of having been founded by the Apostle St. Peter, and being the place where the disciples of Jesus Christ were first called *Christians*.

St. Ignatius undertook the government of this church after the death of Evodius, the successor of St. Peter, which occurred in the year of the Lord 69. Cardinal Orsi cites the opinion of some who would have it that St. Ignatius was the immediate successor of St. Peter. Our Saint governed his flock with such zeal that all the churches of Syria consulted him as an oracle. In the persecution of Domitian he had to suffer much, and laboured, at the risk of his life, for the preservation of the Faith, animating his flock to be faithful unto death. He longed for the glory of Martyrdom, frequently saying that he could not be persuaded of his love for Christ till he had testified it with his blood.

Upon the death of Domitian in the year 96, the tempest abated under Nerva, his successor. But during this time heretics did not cease to trouble the Church. This is the reason why the Saint, writing to the faithful of Smyrna, recommended them not to have any communication with heretics: "Be satisfied," he said, "with merely praying to God for those who abstain from the Eucharist, because they deny it to be the flesh of Jesus Christ Who died for our sins."

In the year 105 the persecution was renewed by the Emperor Trajan. This prince, after his conquest of the Scythians and the Dacians, published an edict which obliged all, under pain of death, to offer sacrifice to the gods. Marching afterwards against the Parthians, he arrived at Antioch; and, hearing with how much zeal and success St. Ignatius propagated the Christian Religion, he called him to his presence and thus addressed him: "Art thou that wicked demon called Theophorus, who takest

pleasure in violating our edict of sacrificing to the gods, and dost continue to seduce the inhabitants of this city by preaching the law of Christ?" Ignatius replied: "Yes, prince, I am called Theophorus; by no one can Theophorus be called a demon, because the devils fly from the servants of God. If thou callest me a devil because I endeavour to defeat the machinations of the devil, I well deserve the name." Trajan asked him the signification of the term *Theophorus*; the Saint replied, "It signifies *the bearer of God*." The emperor replied: "Thou carriest God in thy heart; and we, have we not also in ourselves the gods that assist us?" The Saint answered with enthusiasm: "It is an error, O prince, to give the name of gods to the demons you adore: there is only one true God, the creator of Heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, His Only-Begotten Son." The emperor replied: "Dost thou speak of Him Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?" "Yes," answered the Saint, "of Him I speak Who has confounded the malice of the devils, and placed them beneath the feet of those Christians who carry God in their hearts." He added that Trajan would be more happy, and his empire more prosperous, if he would believe in the Lord Jesus; but the emperor, heedless of these exhortations, offered to make him a priest of Jupiter and a member of the senate if he would sacrifice to the gods. The Saint replied that he was content to be a priest of Jesus Christ, for Whom he ardently desired to shed his blood. Trajan, filled with anger, then pronounced sentence upon the Saint -- that he should be conducted in chains to Rome, and devoured by wild beasts at the public games.

St. Ignatius, having heard the sentence, raised his eyes to Heaven, and exclaimed: "I thank Thee, O Lord, because Thou hast vouchsafed to make me worthy of giving Thee a proof of my love by sacrificing my life for Thy Faith. I desire, O Lord, that the beasts may hasten to devour me, that I may make Thee the sacrifice of myself." He then stretched forth his hands to be chained, kissing the manacles as they bound him; and with tears recommending his church to God, he was conducted by the soldiers to Seleucia, and thence to Smyrna, accompanied by two of his deacons, Philo and Agathopodus, who are believed to be the authors of his Acts. Wherever the Saint passed, he ceased not

his exhortations to the Faithful to persevere in Faith and Prayer, to be enamoured of the riches of Heaven, and to despise those of this earth. The Christians came, in great numbers, to meet him and to receive his blessing, especially the bishops and priests of the churches of Asia, who, as they perceived him going joyfully to Martyrdom, wept in the tenderness of affection. Having arrived at Smyrna, he embraced St. Polycarp, and they mutually consoled each other. He thence wrote to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, and Trallia. Amongst other things, he says to the Ephesians: "I carry my chains for Christ, which are to me spiritual pearls, more prized than all the treasures of the world."

Knowing that from Smyrna some Ephesians had to go to Rome by a route shorter than his, he conveyed by them his celebrated letter to the Romans; the letter is long, but a few passages are particularly worthy of being transcribed. They are as follows:

"Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, whereby I may attain unto God. I am the wheat of God, and am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, in order that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.... I earnestly desire the wild beasts that are prepared for me, which I heartily wish may soon dispatch me. I will entice them to devour me entirely and suddenly, that they may not spare me as they have others whom they feared to touch; but, if they are unwilling to meddle with me, I will even compel them to it. Pardon me, my children, I know what is good for me; I now commence to be a disciple of Christ, since I have no desire for anything visible or invisible, so that I may attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire or the cross, or the concourse of wild beasts -- let cutting or tearing of the flesh -- let breaking of bones and cutting of limbs -- let the shattering in pieces of my entire body, and all the torments invented by the devil, come upon me that so I may attain unto Jesus Christ.... It is better for me to die for the sake of Jesus Christ, than to rule to the ends of the earth.... Pardon me, brethren; be not a hindrance in my attaining to life, for Jesus Christ is the Life of the faithful. Whilst I desire to belong to God, do not ye give me back to the world.... Permit me to imitate the Passion of Christ my God; let none of you who are present attempt to succour me. Be rather on my side, that is, on God's. Entertain no desire of the world; having Jesus Christ in

your mouths, let no envy find place in your breasts. Even were I myself to entreat you, when present, do not obey me, but rather believe what I now signify to you by letter... My love is crucified!... I take no pleasure in the food of corruption, nor in the enjoyment of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, and for drink, His Blood.... Pray for me, that I may possess God. If I consummate my sacrifice this will be a sign that you have given your consent and that you truly love me."

He next arrived at Troas, whence he wrote Epistles to the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna, and to his friend, St. Polycarp. The soldiers fearing that they would arrive too late at Rome, for the public games were nearly at an end, hastened their march, to the great satisfaction of the holy Martyr who ardently desired to be at the place of execution. When he was near Rome, the Christians came in great numbers to meet and salute him. They thought, as Fleury relates, to induce the people to solicit his pardon, but the Saint repeated what he had stated in his letters, and prevented all interference. On entering Rome, he knelt down with the other Christians to offer himself to God, and fervently prayed that peace might be restored to the Church. He was then conducted to the Amphitheatre, where immense numbers were assembled; and, hearing the bellowings of the wild beasts, he repeated the memorable words of his Epistle to the Romans: "I am the wheat of God, and am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, in order that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." The Saint was instantly devoured by lions, as he had desired to be, and at the moment of his death he was heard to invoke the adorable Name of Jesus.

Only the larger bones of his body were left; these were collected and brought to Antioch by his two deacons, to whom he appeared on the following night, resplendent with glory. His Martyrdom took place on the 20th December in the year 107. After the destruction of Antioch by the Saracens, his relics were removed to Rome, and placed in the Church of St. Clement where at the present day they are venerated with great devotion. His name has been inserted in the Canon of the Mass.

Evening Meditation

PASSING INTO ETERNITY

I.

It is of Faith that my soul is immortal, and that one day, when I least expect it, I must leave this world. I ought therefore to make provision for myself which will not fail with this life, but will be eternal even as I am eternal. Great things were done here in their lifetime by an Alexander or a Caesar; but for how many ages past have their glories ceased! And where are they now?

O my God, that I had always loved Thee! What now remains to me, after so many years spent in sin, but trouble and remorse of conscience? But since Thou dost allow me time to repair the evil I have done, behold me, Lord, ready to perform whatever Thou requirest of me, whatever Thou pleasest. I will spend the remainder of my days in bewailing my ungrateful conduct towards Thee, and in loving Thee with all my power, my God and my All and my only Good.

What will it avail me to have been happy in this world (if indeed true happiness can be attained without God), if hereafter I should be miserable for all eternity? But what folly it is, to know that I must die, and that an eternity either of happiness or misery awaits me after death, and that upon dying ill or well depends my being miserable or happy forever, and yet, not to adopt every means in my power to secure a good death!

Holy Spirit, enlighten and strengthen me to live always in Thy grace, until the hour of my departure. O infinite Goodness, I am sensible of the evil which I have done in offending Thee, and I detest it: I know that Thou alone art worthy of being loved, and I love Thee above all things.

II.

In a word, all the good things of this life must end at our burial and be left behind, while we are mouldering in our graves. The shadow of death will cover and obscure all the grandeur and splendour of this world. Only he, then, can be called happy who serves God in this world, and by loving and serving Him acquires eternal happiness.

O Jesus, I am truly sorry for having hitherto made so little account of Thy love. Now I love Thee above all things, and I

desire nothing else but to love Thee. Henceforth Thou only shalt be the sole object of my love; Thou only shalt be my All; and this is the only inheritance I ask of Thee, -- to love Thee always, both in this life and in the next. By the merits of Thy bitter Passion, give me perseverance in all virtues. Mary, Mother of God, thou art my hope.

Tuesday--Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

IN DEATH THE SINNER SHALL SEEK FOR PEACE AND THERE SHALL BE NONE.

What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the Judgment seat of Jesus Christ Whose laws and friendship he has till then despised? *When distress shall come upon them, they shall seek for peace and there shall be none. Trouble shall come upon trouble* (Ezech. vii. 25). O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope!

I.

At present sinners banish the remembrance and thought of death, and thus expect to find peace though they shall never find it in the sinful life they lead. But when they are in the straits of death and on the point of entering into eternity, *they shall seek peace and there shall be none*. Then they will not be able to fly from the torture of their sinful conscience. They will seek peace, but what peace can be found by a soul loaded with sins which sting her like so many vipers? What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the Judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, Whose law and friendship he has till then despised? *Trouble shall come upon trouble*. The news that he must now die, which has been already announced, the thought of being obliged to take leave of everything in this world, the remorse of conscience, the time lost, the want of time now, the rigour of the Divine Judgment, the unhappy eternity which awaits sinners -- all these things will form a horrible tempest which will confuse the mind and increase diffidence: and thus, full of confusion and distrust, the dying sinner will pass to the other world.

Trusting in the Divine promise, Abraham, with great merit,

hoped in God against human hope. But sinners, with great guilt, hope foolishly and to their own ruin, because they hope not only against hope, but also contrary to the teachings of their Faith, for they despise the menaces of God against all who are obstinate in sin. They are afraid of a bad death, but they fear not to lead a wicked life.

O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. I should despair of the pardon of my sins, and of my eternal salvation, did I not behold you, the Fountains of mercy and grace, through which a God has shed all His Blood, to wash my soul from the sins I have committed. I adore you, then, O holy Wounds, and trust in you. I detest a thousand times, and curse those vile pleasures by which I have displeased my Redeemer, and have miserably lost His friendship. Looking, then, at you, I raise up my hopes, and turn my affections to you, O Wounds of Jesus.

II.

But who has assured them that they will not suddenly be deprived of life by a thunderbolt, by apoplexy, or by the bursting of a blood-vessel? And were they at death even allowed time for repentance, who assures them that they will sincerely return to God? To conquer bad habits, St. Augustine had to fight against them for twelve years. How will the dying man who has always lived 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? I say *sincerely*, because it is not enough to say and to promise with the tongue: it is necessary to promise with the heart. O God, what terror and confusion will seize the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he finds himself overwhelmed with sins, with the fears of the Judgment, of Hell, and of Eternity! Oh what confusion will not these thoughts produce when the dying sinner will find his reason going, his mind darkened, and his whole frame assailed by the pains of approaching death. He will make his confession, he will promise, weep, and seek mercy from God, but without understanding what he does; and in this tempest of agitation, of remorse, of pains and terrors, he will pass to the other life. *The people shall be troubled, and they shall pass* (Job xxxiv. 20). A certain author says that the prayers, the wailings, and promises of dying sinners are like the tears and

promises of a man assailed by an enemy who points a dagger at his throat to take away his life. Miserable the man who, at enmity with God, takes to his bed and passes from the bed of sickness into Eternity!

My dear Jesus, Thou deservest to be loved by all men, and to be loved with their whole heart. I have grievously offended Thee, for I have despised Thy love; but notwithstanding my sinfulness, Thou hast borne with me so long, and with so much mercy invited me to pardon. Ah, my Saviour, do not permit me to offend Thee any more and merit my own damnation. O God, what torture should I feel in hell at the sight of Thy Blood and of the great mercies Thou hast shown me! I love Thee and will always love Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Detach my heart from all love which is not for Thee, and confirm in me a true desire, a true resolution henceforth, to love only Thee, my sovereign Good. O Mary, my Mother, draw me to God, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to Him before I die.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

10. -- ST. PIONIUS, PRIEST

(February 1)

St. Pionius was a priest of the church of Smyrna, and an exceedingly learned man. He was filled with the love of Jesus Christ, and had great zeal for the conversion of souls, which was successfully exercised in the conversion of many infidels and abandoned sinners.

In his time, that is, about the year 250, the persecution of Decius was raging, and the Saint by continual prayer prepared himself for Martyrdom. One day as he was engaged in prayer with Asclepiades and Sabina, two pious Christians, it was revealed to them that on the day following they would be arrested for the Faith. They therefore made an offering of their lives to Jesus Christ, and placed halters about their necks in order to signify to the soldiers that they were ready for Martyrdom.

On the following morning, Palemon, the guardian of the temple, came with a troop of soldiers, and said to them: "Are ye aware of the orders of the emperor, that you are all to sacrifice to the gods of the empire?" Pionius answered: "That of which

we are aware is the order of God, -- not to sacrifice to any but Himself, the Sovereign Lord of all." Upon this reply they were all arrested and led into a great square, where St. Pionius, turning to the enemies of the Faith, said that they were vainly rejoicing on account of the apostasy of some few bad Christians, and protested that no species of torture would ever compel him to adore those whom they impiously called "gods."

Palemon said to him: "And why wilt thou, Pionius, regardless of life, deprive thyself of the beautiful light of the day which thou enjoyest?" The Saint replied: "This light is, indeed, beautiful, but there is another light more glorious, and a life more estimable, to which Christians aspire." The people called upon him to sacrifice, but he answered: "Our resolve is to persevere in the Faith."

The people desired that the Saint should speak in the theatre in order that they might all hear him conveniently, but some told Palemon that if he gave him liberty to speak, a tumult might follow. He therefore said to Pionius: "If thou wilt not sacrifice, come with us at least to the temple." The Saint said: "Our entrance into your temple cannot benefit your gods." "Then," said Palemon, "thou wilt not be persuaded?" Pionius replied: "Would to God I could persuade you all to become Christians!" Some of the idolaters exclaimed: "Thou canst never induce us to do that. We would rather be burned alive." The Saint rejoined: "But it will be worse for you to burn eternally after death."

Palemon, who was anxious to save the life of Pionius, ceased not to importune him; but the Saint resolutely answered: "Thou hast orders to persuade or to punish me; thou canst not persuade, therefore punish." Hereupon Palemon, being enraged, asked: "But why wilt thou not sacrifice?" Pionius: "Because I am a Christian." Palemon: "Who is the God Whom thou adorest?" Pionius: "I adore the Almighty God, Who, having made all things, created us also, as I have learned from Jesus Christ." Palemon: "Sacrifice to the emperor at least." Pionius: "I shall never sacrifice to a man."

The judge then judicially inquired his name, and to what church he belonged. The Saint replied: "I am a Christian, and belong to the Catholic Church." His companions gave the same

answer, and they were all sent to prison. On the road thither some of the idolaters observed that many Christians had sacrificed. The Saint answered: "Each one is master of his own will: my name is Pionius." By this he meant to encourage the others to imitate his example, and remain constant to the Faith.

When they came to the prison, many pious Christians offered them refreshments, but Pionius said: "I have not time to think of anything but the Martyrdom that awaits me." The guards, seeing so many Christians coming to visit the Saint, brought him and his companions to a more remote and obscure place, for which they gave thanks to God, as their more solitary confinement enabled them to commune more freely with God. Notwithstanding the change, however, many Christians, who had abandoned the Faith on account of the violence of the torments, came to Pionius, who wept over their fall and exhorted them to do penance, and hope for pardon, through the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Palemon then arrived with a troop of soldiers, and orders from the proconsul to take the Confessors to Ephesus. The Saint desired to see the order, but the commanding officer put a halter round his neck, and dragged him so violently as almost to suffocate him. He was thus led to the square; and when the Martyrs arrived at the temple, they cast themselves on the ground in order not to enter, but the soldiers dragged them in, and placed them erect before the impious altar. They there met Eudaemon, the unhappy Bishop of Smyrna, who had miserably sacrificed to the gods, and the idolaters vainly hoped that they might be moved by his example to prevaricate also. One of the idolaters wished to place on the head of St. Pionius a crown which had been worn by one of the apostates, but the Saint broke it in pieces, and cast it from him. Not knowing what to do to pervert the Confessors, they brought them back to prison, and while Pionius was entering, one of the soldiers smote him on the head. The Saint bore it with patience, but God chastised his assailant by causing not only his hand, but his side to become swollen and inflamed, so that he could not breathe.

After some days the proconsul arrived at Smyrna, and having summoned Pionius, asked him to what sect he belonged.

The Saint replied: "I am a priest of the Catholic Church." The proconsul rejoined: "Then art thou a doctor and a professor of folly?" Pionius: "No, but of piety." Proconsul: "And of what piety?" Pionius: "Of that piety which has for its object the God Who made heaven and earth." The proconsul then commanded him to sacrifice, but the Saint replied: "I have learned to adore One only living God." The tyrant then ordered him to be tortured, during which having in vain importuned him to sacrifice, he finally condemned him to be burned.

In proceeding to the place of execution, St. Pionius walked quickly and with joyous countenance. Having arrived at the place, he undressed without assistance, and offered himself to be nailed to the stake, after which the pagans exclaimed: "Repent, O Pionius! Promise to obey and thou shalt be saved." But he replied: "I have not felt the pain of the nails. I desire to die that the people may know that death shall be followed by resurrection." The pile having been fired, the Saint closed his eyes, so that the spectators thought he was already dead, but he was only praying. He opened his eyes, and having concluded the prayer with the usual "Amen," placidly gave up the ghost, saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my soul."

The end of his companions is not upon record, but it is piously believed that they also received the crown of Martyrdom.

Evening Meditation

THE REFORMATION OF OUR LIVES

I.

Every one desires to die the death of the Saints; but it is scarcely possible for the Christian to make a holy end who has led a disorderly life until the time of his death, and to die united to God, after having always lived at a distance from Him. The Saints in order to secure a happy death, renounced all the riches, the delights, and all the prospects this world held out to them, and embraced poor and mortified lives. They buried themselves alive in this world to avoid, when dead, being buried for ever in hell. O God, for how many years past have I deserved to be buried in that place of torments, without hope of pardon or of being able to love Thee. But Thou hast waited in order to pardon me. Truly, then, I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, for having

offended Thee, my Sovereign Good. Have pity on me and do not permit me to offend Thee any more.

God forewarns sinners that they will seek Him in death and will not find Him: *You shall seek and shall not find me* (Jo. vii. 34). They will not find Him because they will not then seek Him through love, but only through the fear of hell. They will seek God without renouncing their affection for sin; and hence they shall not find Him. No, my God, I will not wait to seek Thee in death, but will seek and desire Thee from this moment. I am sorry for having hitherto given Thee so much displeasure by seeking to gratify my own inclinations. I am sorry for it. I confess that I have done evil. But Thou wilt not that the heart which seeks Thee should despair but rejoice. *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord* (Ps. civ. 3). Yes, O Lord, I seek Thee and I love Thee more than myself.

II.

How miserable is the Christian who, before he comes to die, has not spent a good part of his life in bewailing his sins! It is not to be denied that such a man may be converted at his death and obtain salvation; but the mind obscured, the heart hardened, the bad habits formed, the passions predominant, render it morally impossible for him to die happily. An extraordinary grace will be necessary for him; but does God reserve such a grace to bestow it upon one who has continued ungrateful to Him even until the moment of death? O God, to what straits are sinners reduced to escape eternal destruction! No, my God, I will not wait until death to repent of my sins and to love Thee. I am sorry now for having offended Thee, and I love Thee now with my whole heart. Suffer me not any more to turn my back upon Thee. Rather let me die. O holy Mary, obtain for me perseverance in virtue.

Wednesday--Fifth Week after Epiphany Morning Meditation

TARDY REGRETS OF A DYING MAN

O fool that I have been! -- the poor sick man will say, -- with the lights and opportunities that God gave me I could have become a Saint! And now I shall scarcely save my soul! The sick

man will wish for time, but the assisting Priest will say: Go forth! Do you not know that death will wait for no one?

I.

The dying man who has neglected the salvation of his soul, will find thorns in everything that is presented to him -- thorns in the remembrance of his past amusements, rivalries overcome, and the former display of pomp; thorns in the friends who will visit him, and in whatever their presence shall bring before his mind; thorns in the confessors who may in turn assist him; thorns in the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, which he must receive; thorns even in the Crucifix placed before him. In that Sacred Image he will read his want of correspondence to the love of a God Who died for his salvation.

O fool that I have been! the poor sick man will say, with the lights and opportunities that God gave me, I could have become a Saint! I could have led a life of happiness in the grace of God, and after the many years He gave me, what do I find but torment, distrust, fears, remorse of conscience, and an account to render to God! I shall now scarcely save my soul! And when will he say this? When the oil in the lamp is just being consumed, and the scene of this world is about to close forever; when he finds himself face to face with two eternities, one happy, the other miserable; when he is near that last gasp on which depends his everlasting bliss or eternal despair. What would he then give for another year, month, or even another week, with the perfect use of his faculties? In the stupefaction, oppression of the chest, and difficulty of breathing under which he labours, he can do nothing; he is incapable of reflection, or of applying his mind to the performance of any good act: he is, as it were, shut up in a dark pit of confusion, where he can see nothing but the ruin that threatens him, and which he feels himself unable to avert. He would wish for time; but the assisting priest shall say to him, *Proficiscere!* -- Go forth! Adjust your accounts as well as you can in the few moments that remain, and depart. Do you not know that death waits for no one, respects no one?

Ah, my God, Thou willest not my death, but that I be converted and live. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now, and I thank Thee for the light which Thou givest me at this

moment. I know the error I have committed in preferring to Thy friendship the vile and miserable goods for which I have despised Thee. I repent, and am sorry with my whole heart for having done Thee so great an injury.

II.

Oh! with what dismay will he then say to himself: This morning I am alive; this evening I shall probably be dead! Today I am in this room; tomorrow I shall be in the grave! And where will my soul be found? With what terror will he be seized when he sees the death candle prepared! When he hears his relatives ordered to withdraw from his apartment, and to return to it no more! When his sight begins to grow dim! Finally, how great will be his alarm and confusion when he sees that death is at hand and the candle is lighted! O candle, how many truths will you then disclose to view! How different will you make things appear then from what they appear at present! O how clearly will you show the dying sinner that all the goods of this world are vanities, folly, and lies! But of what use is it to understand these truths when the time is past for profiting by them?

Ah, my God, cease not during the remainder of my life to assist me by Thy light and Thy grace to know and to do all that I ought to do in order to amend my life. What will it profit me to know these truths when I shall be deprived of the time in which they may be reduced to practice? *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee* (Ps. lxxiii. 19). When the devil tempts me to offend Thee again, ah! I entreat Thee, my Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion to stretch forth Thy hand and to preserve me from falling into sin, and becoming again the slave of my enemies. Grant that in all temptations I may have recourse to Thee, and that I may not cease to recommend myself to Thee as long as the temptations continue. Thy Blood is my hope, and Thy goodness my love. I love Thee, my God, worthy of infinite love. Grant that I may always love Thee. Make known to me the things from which I ought to detach my heart, that I may be entirely Thine: I wish to detach my heart from them: but give me strength to execute this desire. O Queen of Heaven! O Mother of God, pray for me, a sinner. Obtain for me the grace that in all temptations I may never omit to have recourse to Jesus and

to thee, who, by thy intercession, dost preserve from sin all who invoke thee.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

11. -- ST. BLASE, BISHOP OF SEBASTE

(February 3)

St. Blase was a native of the city of Sebaste, in Armenia, and in his younger days applied himself to the study of Philosophy in which he made considerable progress; he afterwards studied Medicine with great success. The Science of the Saints, however, and a desire to grow in the love of God, chiefly occupied his attention, whereby being inflamed with ardent charity towards the poor, he visited them frequently and relieved them in their sickness. Upon the death of the bishop, his fellow citizens unanimously elected him as their pastor, by reason of his extraordinary virtues and great learning.

He accepted the office, as being unwilling to resist the will of God which appeared too manifest in his election to be doubted; but in the government of his church he lost not that spirit of holy retirement which he had had from his youth. He therefore retired to Mount Argeus, without the city, and dwelt in a cave there. During our Saint's residence in this place the Lord was pleased to manifest his sanctity by honouring him with the gift of miracles, and numerous crowds of persons used constantly to come to him for the cure of their bodily diseases as well as of their spiritual maladies. Even the most ferocious animals are said to have proceeded to his cave to be relieved. If they found the Saint in prayer, they would patiently wait until he had done; nor would they depart until they had received his blessing.*

* Four different manuscript Acts of this Saint have been published by the Bollandists, who observe that the first is of very great antiquity. These four MSS. agree in the leading facts, and all mention the circumstance of the beasts visiting our Saint and being blessed by him. The MS. III. compares St. Blase, in this respect, to Daniel in the den of lions, and to Elias in the wilderness; and MS. IV. which was in the possession of Cardinal Baronius, observes that, as the Prophet was fed by ravens, so our Saint was supplied with food by the wild beasts that frequented

his cave. As it was the sin of man that first rendered animals savage towards man, it has been regarded as a proof of the innocence and sanctity of a person to find wild beasts inoffensive and familiar with him; and several instances of this mark of holiness are to be met with in the *Lives of the Saints*. The blessing of those beasts by St. Blase will remind some readers of the ceremony still performed at Rome, on St. Anthony's Day (17th January), when horses and other useful animals are assembled before the church and blessed. In the beginning, Almighty Creator Himself blessed all His creatures, but after the fall of man, pronounced a curse upon the earth. It is to avert as much as possible the effects of this malediction that we pray for the giving and preserving of the fruits of the earth, and for the well-being of those animals that God has created for our benefit, and for the manifestation of His own Almighty power. Some non-Catholics are found who, with scrupulous punctuality, say *grace* before meat, and implore the blessing of Heaven on the roasted ribs of an ox upon their table, and yet so far forget themselves as to ridicule the blessing pronounced over the *living* animal on St. Anthony's Day in Rome. -- ED.

About the year 315, Agricolaus, governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, had been sent by the Emperor Licinius to Sebaste to put to death the Christians of that city. Immediately upon his arrival he commenced to put his bloody commission into execution, by commanding that all those who had been already imprisoned for the Faith should be devoured by wild beasts. He accordingly sent huntsmen into the neighbouring forest to catch the ferocious animals, in order to execute his barbarous design. When they arrived at Mount Argeus, they found a multitude of these beasts assembled round the cave of St. Blase, and the holy bishop in the midst of them performing his devotions. Astonished at this sight, they returned to Agricolaus, and informed him of the fact, which, although it caused him to marvel greatly, did not prevent him from sending his soldiers to arrest our Saint. When they intimated to him the order of the governor he answered with a cheerful countenance: "Let us go to shed our blood for Jesus Christ!" Then turning to those who stood by, he protested that he had long sighed for the honour of

Martyrdom, and that on the preceding night the Lord had manifested to him that He would vouchsafe to accept the sacrifice of his life.

As soon as the news was spread among the citizens that their bishop was being led to Sebaste by order of the governor, the streets were filled with people who, with tears in their eyes, asked his blessing. Among them was a woman, who, weeping bitterly, presented to him her child, who was expiring by reason of a small bone having stuck in his throat. Full of holy confidence, she besought the Saint to save the child's life. St. Blase, moved to compassion by the tears of the afflicted mother, prayed to the Lord not only for the relief of that child, but for all those who should find themselves similarly afflicted. Having terminated his prayer the child recovered; and hence the origin of the special devotion of the faithful to this Saint when afflicted with diseases of the throat.

When St. Blase arrived at the city and was presented to the governor, he was commanded to sacrifice to the "immortal gods." The Saint answered: "What a title for your demons who can bring only evil on their worshippers! There is only One Immortal God and Him do I adore." Agricolaus, infuriated at this answer, caused the Saint to undergo a scourging so prolonged and cruel that it was thought the Saint could not possibly survive it; but having endured the torture with placid courage, he was sent to prison where he continued to work miracles so extraordinary that the governor ordered him to be again lacerated with iron hooks.

The blood of the Saint ran profusely, and certain pious women were induced to collect portions of it, which act of devotion was amply rewarded, for they were seized, with two of their children and brought before the governor. He commanded them to sacrifice to the gods under pain of death. The holy women asked for their idols, as some thought, to sacrifice to them, but they no sooner laid hands upon them than they cast them into an adjoining lake, for which they and their children were instantly beheaded.

Agricolaus resolved to wreak his vengeance on St. Blase; and therefore not content with the torture he had already caused him

to endure, commanded him to be stretched upon the rack, and his flesh to be torn with iron combs, in which state a red-hot coat of mail was placed upon him. Finally, the tyrant, despairing of overcoming his constancy, ordered him to be cast into the lake. The Saint, arming himself with the Sign of the Cross, walked upon the waters, and, arriving at the middle, sat down, and invited the idolaters to do the same if they believed that their gods could enable them. Some were so rash as to make the attempt, but were immediately drowned.

St. Blase was admonished then by a voice from Heaven to go forth from the lake and encounter his Martyrdom. When he reached the land the impious tyrant ordered him to be beheaded. This sentence was executed in the year 313. The Republic of Ragusa honours him as their Principal Patron, and he is the Titular Saint of many cities.

Evening Meditation

THE MERCIFUL CHASTISEMENTS OF GOD

I.

God is infinite Goodness and desires only our good and to communicate to us His own happiness. When He chastises us, it is because we have obliged Him to do so by our sins. Hence the Prophet Isaias says that on such occasions He doth a work *that is strange to him* (Is. xxviii. 21). Hence it is said that it is the property of God to have mercy and to spare, to dispense His favours and to make all happy.

O God, it is this Thy infinite Goodness which sinners offend and despise when they provoke Thee to chastise them! Wretch that I am, how often have I offended Thy infinite Goodness!

Let us therefore understand that when God threatens us it is not because He desires to punish us, but because He wishes to deliver us from punishment; He threatens because He would have compassion on us. *O God,... thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us* (Ps. lix. 3). But how is this? He is angry with us and yet treats us with mercy? Yes! He shows Himself angry towards us in order that we may amend our lives, and that thus He may be able to pardon and save us. Hence, if in this life He chastises us for our sins, He does so in His mercy, for by so doing He frees us from eternal chastisements. How unfortunate, then, is the

sinner who escapes punishment in this life!

Since, then, O my God, I have so much offended Thee, chastise me in this life, that Thou mayest spare me in the next. I know that I have certainly deserved hell; I accept all kinds of pain, that Thou mayest reinstate me in Thy grace and deliver me from hell where I should be forever separated from Thee. Enlighten and strengthen me to overcome every obstacle to Thy friendship.

II.

He that makes no account of the Divine threats ought to fear much lest the chastisement threatened in Scripture should suddenly overtake him. *The man that with a stiff neck despiseth him that reproveth him, shall suddenly be destroyed, and health shall not follow him* (Prov. xxix. 1). A sudden death shall overtake him that despises God's reprehensions, and he shall have no time to avoid eternal destruction.

This, O Jesus, has happened to so many, and I, indeed, have deserved that the like should happen to me; but, O my Redeemer, Thou hast shown mercy towards me that Thou hast not shown to many others who have offended Thee less frequently than I have, and who are now suffering in hell with not the least hope of ever again being able to regain Thy favour. I know, O Lord, that Thou desirest my salvation, and I also desire it that I may please Thee. I renounce all and turn myself to Thee, Who art my God and my only Good. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, and Thee alone. O infinite Goodness, I am exceedingly displeased with myself for having hitherto done evil against Thee; and I wish that I had suffered every evil rather than offended Thee. Suffer me not any more to depart from Thee; rather let me die than offer Thee so great an injury. In Thee, my crucified Jesus, do I place all my hopes. O Mary, Mother of Jesus, recommend me to thy Son.

Thursday--Fifth Week after Epiphany **Morning Meditation**

CONFIDENCE IN JESUS CHRIST

The Divine Mercy is like a vast fountain from which he who has brought the largest vessel of confidence carries away

the richest abundance of graces. This is according to what the Psalmist says: *Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, according as we have put our trust in thee* (Ps. xxxii. 22). Let us go with confidence, then, to the feet of Jesus Christ, and there we shall find mercy and pardon.

I.

Wonderfully great is the mercy of Jesus Christ to us; but for our greater good He desires that we should put our trust in His mercy with a lively confidence, trusting in His merits and His promises. Therefore St. Paul recommends us to preserve this confidence, saying that it has a great reward from God. (Heb. x. 35). When a fear, then, of the Divine Judgment seems to diminish this confidence in us, we ought to cast it away, and say to ourselves: "My heart, dost thou tremble? Knowest thou not how to hope? Banish thy fear, and tremble not. Why wilt thou trouble me? Hope in the Lord that we may one day sing His praise and His glory."

The Lord revealed to St. Gertrude that our confidence so constrains Him that He cannot possibly refuse to hear us in whatever we seek of Him. The same was said by St. John Climachus: "Prayer exerts a holy violence upon God." Every prayer offered with confidence, as it were, forces God; but this force is acceptable and pleasing to Him. Therefore, St. Bernard writes that the Divine mercy is like a vast fountain from which he who brings a larger vessel of confidence carries away a richer abundance of graces. And this is according to what the Psalmist wrote, *Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, according as we have put our trust in thee* (Ps. xxxii. 22).

God has declared by the Royal Prophet that He *protects and saves all who trust in him* (Ps. xvii. 31; xvi. 7). And again: *Let all them be glad that hope in thee: they shall rejoice for ever, and thou shalt dwell in them* (Ps. v. 12). The same Prophet said: *Mercy is round about all who trust in God* (Ps. xxxi. 10). He that trusts in God shall ever be so guarded and encircled around that he is safe from all danger of perishing. Oh, what great promises the Holy Scriptures make to those who trust in God! Are we lost through our sins? Behold the remedy at hand! *Let us go with confidence*, says the Apostle, *to the feet of Jesus Christ, the throne of grace, and*

there shall we find mercy and pardon (Heb. iv. 16). Let us not wait to go to Jesus Christ until He sits upon His *throne of Judgment*; let us hasten at once while He sits on His *throne of grace*.

II.

But, says the sinner, if I beg for pardon I do not deserve to be heard. I reply, though he does not deserve pardon, his confidence in the Divine mercy will obtain grace for him; for this pardon is not dependent upon his merits, but upon the Divine promise to pardon those who repent; and this is what Jesus Christ says: *Every one that asketh receiveth* (Luke, xi. 10). A certain author commenting on the words *every one*, says that they mean every one, whether just or unjust. It is sufficient that they pray with confidence. Let us, then, learn from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself what great things are done by confidence: *All things whatsoever ye seek when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive, and they shall come unto you* (Mark xi. 24).

Whosoever, then, fears that through infirmity he shall fall again into his old sins, let him trust in God, and he shall not fall, as the Prophet assures us: *None of them that trust in him shall offend* (Ps. xxxiii. 23). Isaias says that *they who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength* (Is. xl. 31). Let us, then, be strong, not wavering in our confidence, because God has promised, as St. Paul says, to protect all who hope in Him; and when anything seems especially difficult to overcome, then let us say, *I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13). And who that ever trusted in God was confounded? Yet, let us not search after some constant sensible confidence, a confidence we can feel. It is enough if we have *the will to trust*. This is true confidence, *the will to trust in God*, because He is good and desires to help us, is powerful and can help us, is faithful and has promised to help us. Above all, let us strengthen ourselves with the promise made by Jesus Christ: *Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you* (John xvi. 23). Thus let us seek grace from God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, and we shall obtain what we wish.

O Eternal God, I know that I am poor in all things; I can do nothing, I have nothing, save what comes to me from Thy hands; all I can say to Thee is: O Lord, have mercy upon me!

My misery is, that to my poverty I have added the sin of having responded to Thy graces with the sins I have committed against Thee. But, notwithstanding, I would hope from Thy mercy for this twofold blessing: first, that Thou wouldst pardon my sins; and then, that Thou wouldst give me perseverance, together with Thy holy love and grace to pray to Thee constantly for help even until death. I ask it all of Thee; I hope for it through the merits of Thy Son Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. O my chief advocate, help me with thy prayers.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

12. -- SS. PHILEAS, BISHOP OF THMUIS, AND
PHILOROMUS, TRIBUNE

(February 4)

Among the many Martyrs of Egypt and Thebais Saints Phileas and Philoromus attract particular attention on account of their exalted rank and the high estimation in which, according to Eusebius, they were held in their own country. They shed their blood for the Faith at Alexandria, between the years 306 and 312.

Phileas had discharged some of the highest offices of state in the city of Thmuis, in Egypt. He was a pagan by birth, was married, and had children who were still pagans when the Saint laid down his life for Christ. He was somewhat advanced in life when he was converted, but the Lord filled him with such virtue, that he deserved to be appointed bishop of his native place.* He was arrested during the persecution and was conducted to prison in Alexandria.

*In the primitive times in which 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 then obliged to live in perpetual continence. The ministers of the altar are consecrated to God, and can no longer belong to any one except to God alone. -- ED.

We have a letter written by him to his flock, while he was in prison for the Faith and about to consummate his Martyrdom, which shows his holy zeal and pastoral solicitude. He there encourages the faithful to suffer every torture for Jesus Christ

rather than renounce the Faith; adducing the examples of so many saintly heroes who, having the eyes of their souls fixed on God, went joyfully to encounter death, in the full confidence that God would comfort His servants in the trial that would win for them eternal life. He then exhorts them to confide in the merits of Jesus Christ, and to keep continually before their eyes His Passion and Death, as well as the eternal rewards Christ promises to those who will be constant in confessing Him before men.

A short time after the writing of this letter the Martyrs were brought before Culcian, the governor of Egypt, who exhorted them to have pity upon themselves, their wives and children, who, together with many relatives and friends in Alexandria, had come to dissuade them. But all their arts were incapable of shaking the constancy of the Martyrs. Phileas, standing upon the platform and being told by the governor to enter into himself and be wise, answered: "I have never lost my judgment." Culcian: "Then sacrifice to the gods." Phileas: "I sacrifice to only One God, not to many."

"Thy conscience," said the governor, "should make thee sacrifice for thy wife and children." Phileas answered: "Conscience obliges me to prefer God to all things; since the Scripture saith that thou shalt love thy God Who created thee above all things." "Which God?" said Culcian. The Saint stretching out his hand to Heaven, said: "That God Who created Heaven and earth, and endureth forever." Culcian asked him: "Was Christ God?" The Saint replied: "Yes, truly, for He hath raised the dead to life, and worked many other miracles." "But how!" exclaimed the governor; "Was a God, then, crucified?" "Yes," replied Phileas; "He was crucified for our salvation, for which He willingly suffered ignominy and death; all His sufferings were foretold in the Holy Scriptures. If any be desirous of further information, let them come forward and they shall see the truth!"

The Saint then told the governor that he was anxious for him to execute his orders. "Then," said Culcian, "thou art anxious to die without reason." "Not without reason," said Phileas, "but for God and for the truth." "I would wish," said the governor, "to save thee for thy brother's sake."* But Phileas replied: "I beseech thee to execute that which hath been commanded thee."

Culcian said: "If I knew thee to be poor, I would not desire to save thee; but thou art possessed of great wealth, and canst support many; sacrifice, therefore and live." Phileas answered: "I will not sacrifice." Culcian: "Dost thou not see thy wife, how piteously she looks upon thee?" Phileas: "Jesus Christ Whom I serve, is our Saviour; as He has called me; He can also call her to the inheritance of His glory."

*This brother, Alban Butler says, was one of the judges. --
ED.

The governor here offered him time to consider; but the holy bishop said: "I have given all these points sufficient consideration and am determined to suffer for Christ." Hereupon his relatives cast themselves at his feet, and besought him to have compassion upon his wife and children; but the Saint, raising his eyes to God, declared that he should not think of any relatives other than the Saints in Heaven.

Among the persons of distinction present at this spectacle was Philoromus, a military tribune, who held a very high office in the administration of justice. Having listened to the wailings of the bishop's relatives and the exhortations of the governor, he raised his voice and exclaimed: "Why do you vainly endeavour to shake his constancy? Why do you fatigue yourselves uselessly with one whom you see faithful to his God? Do you not perceive that your entreaties and your tears are of no avail? Tears shed from human motives cannot move the soul of a Christian who has God before his eyes." The entire multitude, enraged at these words of Philoromus, cried out that he should be condemned to the same death as Phileas; whereupon the governor commanded that both should be beheaded.

As the entire crowd were proceeding with the Martyrs to the place of execution, the bishop's brother said with a loud voice that Phileas had demanded an appeal. Culcian instantly called them back; but Phileas said: "I have not demanded any appeal. Give no ear to this wretched man. I am much beholden to the judges who have made me a co-heir with Jesus Christ."

Having said this he moved forward to the place of execution, where, having arrived together with his companion, he raised his voice and spoke to the Christians: "My dear children, those of

you that seek God in truth should be careful to abstain from sin, since the enemy goeth about seeking whom he may devour. As yet we had not suffered. We now commence to suffer, and to be truly disciples of Jesus Christ. Be ye attentive to the observance of His Commandments, and continually invoke the Creator of all things, to Whom be glory forever!" At the termination of this exhortation both Martyrs were beheaded. In this manner did these two heroes consummate their sacrifice.

Evening Meditation

THE FOLLY OF LIVING AS ENEMIES OF GOD

I.

Sinners call the Saints fools, who, in this life, fly from honours, riches, and the pleasures of sense, and embrace poverty, contempt, and mortification. But at the day of final retribution those sinners will confess that they themselves have been fools in judging the lives of the Saints to be folly: *We fools esteemed their life madness* (Wis. v. 4). And what greater folly can there be than to live without God? -- which is to live a miserable life in this world, to be succeeded by a still more miserable life in hell.

No, I will not wait till the Last Day to confess my folly; I now confess it. How great has my folly been in offending Thee, my sovereign Good! *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son* (Luke xv. 19). Father, I am not worthy to receive Thy forgiveness, but I hope for it through the Blood which Thou hast shed for my sake. My Jesus, I am sorry for having despised Thee, I love Thee above all things.

Unhappy sinners! Blinded by their sins, they lose all judgment. What would be said of a man who should sell a kingdom for the smallest coin? And what should be said of him who, for a momentary pleasure, a vapour, a caprice, sells Heaven and the grace of God? They think only of this life, which will shortly end; and in the meantime deserve hell for the life which will never end.

O my God, permit me not any more to become so blind as to prefer to Thee my own unlawful gratifications, and for the sake of them to despise Thee, my sovereign Good! I now detest them and love Thee above all things.

II.

Miserable worldlings! The time will come when they will bewail their folly. But when? When there shall be no longer anything to prevent their eternal ruin. Then shall they say: *What hath pride profited us, or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow* (Wis. v. 8, 9). Behold, they will exclaim, how all our delights have passed away like a shadow, and nothing now remains to us but suffering and eternal lamentation. Dear Jesus, have pity on me! I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me. I love Thee with my whole soul, and I detest, above all evil whatsoever, the sins I have committed against Thee. Pardon me, O God and remember not my offences against Thee. And since Thou knowest my weakness, do not abandon me. Give me strength to overcome all things to please Thee. O Mary, Mother of God, in you do I place my hopes.

Friday--Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE WOUNDS OF JESUS OUR HOPE

The Wounds of Jesus Christ are now the blessed Fountains from which we can draw forth all graces. What, then, art thou afraid of, O sinner? Be not distrustful, says Jesus; see how much thou didst cost Me! I keep thee engraven upon My hands in these Wounds. These are ever reminding Me to help thee, and to defend thee from thine enemies. Love Me and have confidence!

I.

Oh, how great is the hope of salvation which the death of Jesus Christ imparts to us! *Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus who died, who also maketh intercession for us* (Rom. viii. 34). Who is it, asks the Apostle, that has to condemn us? It is that same Redeemer Who, in order not to condemn us to eternal death, condemned Himself to a cruel death upon a Cross. From this St. Thomas of Villanova encourages us, saying: "What dost thou fear, sinner, if thou art willing to leave off thy sin? How should that Lord condemn thee, Who died in order not to condemn thee? How should He drive thee away when thou returnest to His feet, He Who came from Heaven to seek thee when thou wert fleeing from Him? "What art thou afraid of, sinner? How

shall He condemn thee penitent, Who died that you may not be Condemned? How shall He cast thee off returning, Who came from Heaven seeking thee?" But greater still is the encouragement given us by this same Saviour of ours, when, speaking by Isaiah, He says: *Behold, I have graven thee upon my hands; thy walls are always before my eyes* (Is. xlix. 16). Be not distrustful, My sheep; see how much thou didst cost Me. I keep thee engraved upon My hands, in these Wounds which I have suffered for thee; these are ever reminding Me to help thee, and to defend thee from thine enemies: love Me, and have confidence.

Yes, my Jesus, I love Thee, and feel confidence in Thee. To rescue me, yea, this has cost Thee dear; but to save me will cost Thee nothing. It is Thy will that all should be saved, and that none should perish. If my sins cause me to dread, Thy goodness reassures me; more desirous as Thou art to do me good than I am to receive it. Ah, my beloved Redeemer, I will say to Thee with Job: *Even though thou shouldst kill me, yet will I hope in thee, and thou wilt be my Saviour* (Job xiii. 15). Wert Thou even to drive me away from Thy Presence, O my Love, yet would not I cease from hoping in Thee, Who art my Saviour. These Wounds of Thine and this Blood encourage me to hope for every good from Thy mercy. I love Thee, O dear Jesus, I love Thee and I hope in Thee.

II.

The glorious St. Bernard one day in sickness saw himself before the Judgment-seat of God where the devil was accusing him of his sins, and telling him that he did not deserve Paradise: "It is true that I deserve not Paradise," the Saint replied, "but Jesus has a twofold title to this kingdom, -- in the first place, as being by nature Son of God; in the next place, as having purchased it by His death. He contents Himself with the first of these, and the second He makes over to me; and therefore it is that I ask and hope for Paradise." We, too, can say the same; for St. Paul tells us that the will of Jesus Christ to die consumed by sufferings, had for its end the obtaining of Paradise for all sinners that are penitent, and resolved to amend: *And, being perfected, he was made the cause of eternal salvation to all that obey him* (Heb. viii. 9). And hence the Apostle subjoins: *Let us run to the fight proposed unto*

us, looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who, having joy proposed unto him, underwent the cross, despising the shame (Heb. xii. 1, 2). Let us go forth with courage to fight against our enemies, fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ, Who, together with the merits of His Passion, offers us the victory and the crown.

Ah, my loving Father, I thank Thee for having given me this Thy Son for my Saviour; I offer to Thee His death; and for the sake of His merits, I pray Thee for mercy. And ever do I return thanks to Thee, O my Redeemer, for having given Thy Blood and Thy life to deliver me from eternal death. "We pray Thee, therefore, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious Blood." Help us, then, Thy rebellious servants, since Thou hast redeemed us at so great a cost. O Jesus, my one and only Hope. Thou dost love me, Thou hast power to do all things; make me a Saint. If I am weak, do Thou give me strength; if I am sick, in consequence of the sins I have committed, do Thou apply to my soul one drop of Thy Blood and heal me. Give me Thy love and final perseverance, making me die in Thy grace. Give me Paradise; through Thy merits do I ask it of Thee, and hope to obtain it. I love Thee, O my most lovely God, with all my soul; and I hope to love Thee always. Oh, help a miserable sinner, who is wishing to love Thee.

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

13. -- ST. AGATHA, VIRGIN

(February 5)

This holy virgin and Martyr is held in great veneration by the Greek as well as the Latin Church; and although her original Acts have not been preserved, many well-authenticated facts concerning her Martyrdom are found in the Bollandists, Surius, and others. She was a native of Sicily, and descended from a noble and opulent family. These circumstances, added to her extraordinary beauty, inflamed Quintianus, a man of consular dignity, with such love of her that he resolved to compel her to become his wife. The edicts of the Emperor Decius against the Christians having been published, he ordered Agatha to be arrested as a Christian, and conducted to Catania where he then resided.

The holy virgin having heard the proclamation against the Christians, retired to a solitary place in order to avoid the snares of Quintianus, concerning which she had received some intimation. The emissaries of the governor, however, discovered her place of concealment, and after having been arrested, she prayed in the following manner: "O Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, Thou seest my heart, and knowest my desire, which is to possess only Thee, since I have consecrated myself entirely to Thee. Preserve me, dear Lord, from this tyrant, and enable me to overcome the devil who layeth snares for my soul."

When the Saint appeared before Quintianus, in order the more easily to overcome her modesty, he gave her up to Aphrodisia, an abominable woman who, together with her daughters, kept an infamous house. In this infamous house the Saint suffered greater torture than the darkest and most fetid dungeon could cause. All the arts of Aphrodisia and her partners in crime were unceasingly applied, in order to induce the Saint to comply with the wishes of Quintianus; but Agatha, who from her infancy had been consecrated to Jesus Christ, was enabled by His Divine grace to overcome all their attempts.

Quintianus, having been informed that the efforts of Aphrodisia for an entire month had been employed in vain, commanded that the Saint should be again brought before him. He upbraided her that, being free born and noble, she had allowed herself to be seduced into the humble servitude of the Christians. The holy virgin courageously confessed that she was a Christian, and that she knew of no nobility more illustrious, nor liberty more real, than to be a servant of Jesus Christ. In order to give the governor to understand how infamous were the deities which he adored and desired her to worship, she asked whether he would wish that his wife should be a prostitute, like Venus, or that he himself should be considered an incestuous adulterer like Jupiter. Quintianus, irritated at her rebuke, commanded her to be buffeted and led to prison. The following day she was again summoned, and asked whether she had resolved to save her life. She replied: "God is my Life and my Salvation." The governor then put her to the torture; but perceiving how little it affected her, he commanded her breasts to be lacerated, and afterwards

cut off; a sentence which was executed with barbarous cruelty.

Quintianus then remanded the Saint to prison, commanding that her wounds should be left undressed, in order that she might expire under the torture. But at midnight St. Peter appeared to her in a vision, completely cured her wounds, and freed her from all pain. During the whole of that night there appeared in the interior of the prison so resplendent a light that the guards fled in terror, leaving the door of her dungeon open, so that she could have escaped, as the other prisoners advised her, but she was unwilling, as she said, to lose by flight the crown that was being prepared for her in Heaven.

Quintianus, in no way moved by her miraculous cure, but on the contrary more irritated, after four days devised new torments for the Saint. He commanded that she should be rolled over broken tiles, mixed with burning coals. But she endured all with constancy, and while the tyrant was planning fresh torments, the Saint, perceiving that her life was drawing to a close, made the following prayer: "O Lord, my Creator, Who hast preserved me from my infancy, hast given me strength to overcome these torments, and hast taken from me the love of the world, receive now my soul. It is time that I should at last pass from this miserable life to the fruition of Thy glory." Just as she had finished these words, she tranquilly expired, and went to be united to God to praise Him and love Him forever. This happened in 251. St. Agatha is mentioned in the Canon of the Mass.

Evening Meditation

WHEN JESUS APPEARS MOST LOVELY

I.

The Incarnate Word was called by the Sacred Spouse, *All lovely; such is my beloved* (Cant. v. 16). At whatever period of His life Jesus Christ presents Himself to us, He appears altogether desirable and most worthy of love, whether we see Him as an Infant in the stable, as a Boy in the workshop of St. Joseph, as a Solitary meditating in the desert, or bathed in sweat as He went preaching through Judea. But in no other form does He appear more loving than when nailed to the Cross on which the immense love He bears us forced Him to die. St. Francis de Sales has said, the Mount of Calvary is the Hill of Lovers. All

love which does not take its rise from the Passion of the Saviour is weak. How miserable is the death where there is no love of the Redeemer! Let us stop, then, and consider that this Man, nailed to the Tree of shame, is our true God, and that He is here suffering and dying for nothing but the love of us.

Ah, my Jesus, if all men would be still and contemplate Thee on the Cross, believing with a lively Faith that Thou art their God, and that Thou hast died for their salvation, how could they live far from Thee and without Thy love? And how could I, knowing all this, have displeased Thee so often? If others have offended Thee, they have at least sinned in darkness; but I have sinned in the light. But these pierced Hands, this wounded Side, this Blood, these Wounds which I see in Thee, make me hope for pardon and Thy grace. I am grieved, my Love, for having ever so despised Thee. But now I love Thee with all my heart; and my greatest grief is the remembrance of my having despised Thee. This grief, however, is a sign that Thou hast pardoned me. O burning Heart of my Jesus, inflame my poor heart with Thy love! O sorrowful Mother Mary, make me faithful in loving Jesus!

II.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matt. xxvii. 46).

Oh, who shall not compassionate the Son of God, dying of grief on a Cross, for the love of men? He is tormented externally in His body by innumerable Wounds, and internally He is so afflicted and sad that He seeks solace for His great sorrow from the Eternal Father; but His Father, in order to satisfy His Divine Justice, abandons Him, and leaves Him to die desolate and deprived of every consolation.

O desolate death of my dear Redeemer, thou art my hope. O my abandoned Jesus, Thy merits make me hope that I shall not remain abandoned and separated from Thee forever in hell. I do not care to live in consolation on this earth; I embrace all the pains and desolations that Thou mayest send me. He is not worthy of consolation who by offending Thee has merited for himself eternal torments. It is enough for me to love Thee and to live in Thy grace. This alone do I beg of Thee, let me nevermore see myself deprived of Thy love. Let me be abandoned by all;

but do not Thou abandon me in this extremity. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who didst die abandoned for me. I love Thee, my only Good, my only Hope, my only Love!

Saturday--Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

CONFIDENCE IN THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HER POWER TO HELP US

Consider how great are the grounds of hope the soul has that trusts in the intercession of the great Mother of God. Behold the words applied by the Church to Mary on her Festivals: *He that shall find me shall find life and shall have salvation from the Lord* (Prov. viii. 35). It is impossible for a true and persevering client of Mary to be lost, for she can want neither the power nor the will to assist him.

I.

He that shall find me shall find life and shall have salvation from the Lord. He that shall find me, says Mary, shall find the life of grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. Addressing the Divine Mother, St. Anselm goes so far as to say that, as it is impossible for a person who is not devoted to Mary and protected by her, to be saved, so, on the other hand, it is impossible for him to be lost who recommends himself to Mary, and is regarded by her with love. St. Antoninus, says that all those that are defended by this great Queen are necessarily saved. St. Bonaventure writes that they that obtain the protection of Mary shall, even while they live on this earth, be acknowledged as companions by the Saints in glory, and that they that carry the badge of servant of Mary be written in the Book of Life. Thus to be devoted to Mary is a mark of predestination. The Angelic Doctor says that Mary is called the *Star of the sea* because, as navigators are directed to the port by means of the pole star, so Christians are guided to Paradise by Mary.

Should a person truly devoted to Mary be lost it would be because she is either unable or unwilling to assist him. "But no," says St. Bernard, "she can neither lack the power nor the will." It is impossible for a true and persevering client of Mary to be

lost; because she can neither want the power nor the will to assist him. To inspire us with confidence, then, in this great advocate, the holy Church invokes her under the title of *Powerful Virgin*. *Virgo potens, ora pro nobis!* Yes, that God Who is omnipotent, has, as she herself has said, given her great power. *He that is mighty hath done great things to me* (Luke i. 49).

My Lady, if thou pray for me, I shall be saved; for thou dost obtain by thy prayers whatsoever thou wishest. Pray, then, for me, O great Mother of God: for thy Son hears thee, and grants whatever thou askest. It is true that I am unworthy of thy protection, but thou hast never abandoned a soul that had recourse to thee. O Mary, I consign my soul to thee; thou hast to save it. Obtain for me perseverance in the Divine grace, and the love of thy Son and of thee.

II.

St. Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, has written: "The Son is pleased that the Mother should pray to Him, because He wishes to grant her whatever she asks, in order to repay her for the favour received from her in giving Him her flesh." St. Bridget heard Jesus say to Mary: "Ask what you wish from Me, for your petition cannot be fruitless." My Mother, ask of Me what you wish; you know that I cannot reject any of your petitions. He then added: "Because you refused Me nothing on earth, I will refuse nothing to you in Heaven." You refused Me nothing while I lived on earth; it is right that I refuse you nothing now that you are with Me in Heaven.

But what is the principal reason the prayers of Mary are so powerful before God? St. Antoninus says: "The prayer of the Mother of God partakes of the nature of a command; hence it is impossible that she should not be heard." The prayers of Mary, being the prayers of a mother, partake in a certain manner of the nature of a command, and therefore they cannot be rejected. Hence, Blessed Albert the Great, used to repeat the words of the Church: *Show thyself a mother!* -- in this sense: O Lady, show thyself a mother! Ask thy Son, as His Mother, to have mercy on us. Cosmas of Jerusalem asserts that the protection of Mary is omnipotent: *Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O Maria*. Yes, says Richard of St. Laurence, it is but just that the Mother should share the

power of the Son. The Son is *omnipotent by nature*, the Mother is *omnipotent by grace*; that is, she obtains by her prayers whatsoever she wishes.

Let a sinner be ever so abandoned, says St. Gregory of Nicomedia, if he has recourse to Mary, she will save him by her intercession. O Mother of God, thou hast invincible power that thy clemency may not be conquered by the multitude of our sins. Nothing can resist thy power since the Creator regards as His own the glory of His Mother. "Thou, then," says St. Peter Damian, "canst do all things, for thou canst inspire even those who are in despair with hopes of salvation." As often as the devil tempts us to diffidence, let us turn to Mary, and say to her, with St. Germanus: "Thou, O Mary, art omnipotent in saving sinners; thy prayers are all-powerful with God, because thou art Mother of true Life."

O my Queen, I love thee, and I hope always to love thee. Do thou also love me. Take me under thy protection and have pity on me: grant me this favour through the love thou bearest thy Son. Behold the confidence that I place in thy clemency, and do not cease to assist me in all my wants. I know that thou wilt not cease to help me as often as I recommend myself to thee; but obtain for me also the grace to have recourse to thee in all my temptations, and in all my dangers of losing God. Assist me, particularly at the hour of my death. Obtain for me the grace that with my last breath I may pronounce thy name, and the Name of thy Son, saying: Jesus and Mary, to you I recommend my soul!

Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

14. -- ST. LEO OF PATARA

(February 18)

At Patara, in Lycia, a great festival was once being celebrated in honour of a certain idol, at which a great concourse assembled. Many went there through fear as an edict had been published commanding the attendance of all. But St. Leo, who was a good Christian, departed from the city, and went to perform his devotions before the relics of St. Paregorius who had died for the Faith some short time previously. Upon his return home, St.

Paregorius appeared to him in a vision, standing at the opposite side of a torrent, and inviting him to pass over.

St. Leo hence conceived a great hope that he would be honoured with Martyrdom; and going some days after to make a second visit to the tomb of St. Paregorius, he passed by the temple of fortune, where many lanterns burned before the idol. Impelled by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, he entered the temple and threw down the lights; but the idolaters, enraged at the insult offered to their idol, raised such a clamour, that the governor heard of the affair, and ordered that the Saint should be brought before him.

When Leo made his appearance, the governor rebuked him for the outrage he had committed against the gods, in violation of the commands of the sovereign. The Saint animated with a holy zeal, replied: "Thou speakest to me of the gods, as if there were many. There is but One God, and Jesus Christ is His Only-Begotten Son. Since statues of stone and wood are devoid of sense and feeling, of what use can lanterns be to them? If thou hadst the knowledge of the true God, thou wouldst not worship these false deities. Oh, do abandon this vain superstition, and adore our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!"

The governor said: "Thou dost, then, exhort me to become a Christian? Better it were for thee to conform to the general practice, lest thy rashness be punished as it deserves." The Saint with increased ardour replied: "I see about me a multitude of those who, blindly persevering in error, despise the true God; but I am a Christian notwithstanding, and follow the instructions of the Apostles. If this deserve chastisement, award it; for I am determined to suffer every torture, rather than become the slave of the devil. Others may do as they please, since they are solicitous merely for the present, and are reckless of the future life which is to be obtained only by sufferings. The Scripture tells us that *narrow is the gate, and strait is the way, that leadeth to life.*" (Matt. vii. 14).

The governor observed: "Since, then, the way of the Christians is narrow; exchange it for ours, which is wide and commodious." Leo answered: "I have said that the way is narrow, because it is one of affliction and of persecutions suffered for justice sake;

but it is wide enough for those who walk therein, because their Faith and the hope of an eternal reward, make it so to them. The love of virtue maketh that easy which to thee seemeth difficult. On the contrary, the road of vice is in reality narrow, and leads to an eternal precipice."

This discourse was most unpalatable to the pagans who accordingly exclaimed that the impious man who had spoken against their religion, should be silenced. The governor then asked St. Leo whether he would sacrifice; and being answered that his compliance was totally impossible, he ordered him to be scourged. Although this command was most cruelly executed, the Saint suffered without a groan; whereupon the governor threatened still greater torments; but the Saint answered: "I know not these gods, and will never sacrifice to them." "At least," said the governor, "say that our gods are great, and I will dismiss thee, for I have compassion on thy old age." The Saint replied: "They are great for the destruction of those souls that believe in them." The governor, infuriated at this reply, said: "I will order thee to be dragged over stones till thou art torn to pieces." The Saint replied: "I shall welcome any kind of death that procures me the kingdom of Heaven, and that blessed life which I shall enjoy in company with the Saints, upon my departure from this world."

The tyrant continued to importune him to sacrifice, or at least to acknowledge that the gods could save him from death. The Saint replied: "Thou art very weak, since thou dost nothing but threaten, without putting thy threats into execution." The populace, being enraged at this reply, obliged the judge to condemn the Saint to be tied by the feet and dragged through a torrent.

St. Leo finding himself about to obtain the accomplishment of his desire to die for Jesus Christ, raised his eyes to Heaven and prayed after the following manner: "I thank Thee, O God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for granting me the grace to follow Thy servant Peregoryus. I praise Thee, because Thou hast enabled me, by Martyrdom, to cancel my past sins. I commend my soul to the care of Thy holy Angels, that it may be saved from the perdition prepared for the wicked. I beseech Thee, by

that which it is my blessed lot to suffer, to have mercy on those who are the cause thereof; and since Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, grant them the grace to recognize Thee as the Lord of the universe. May all that which I suffer in the Name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, redound to Thy glory for ever and ever. Amen." As soon as he pronounced the word *Amen*, he rendered up his soul to God, and went to enjoy the crown to which St. Paregorius had invited him.

The executioners cast the body into a deep pit in order to break it to pieces; but it was taken thence and found entire, with only a few slight bruises, and the face appeared comely and smiling.

Evening Meditation

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD

I.

Only the grave, says holy Job, *remaineth for me* (Job xvii. 1). Days and years pass away, pleasures, honours and riches pass away, and what will be the end? Death will come and strip us of all, and we shall be buried in the grave to corrupt and moulder into dust, deserted and forgotten by all. Alas! how, in the end of our lives, will the remembrance of all we have acquired in this world serve for nothing but to increase our anguish and the uncertainty of our salvation!

O death, O death, never depart from before my eyes! O God, do Thou enlighten me!

My life is cut off as by a weaver (Is. xxxviii. 12). How many, in the midst of executing their long contemplated designs, are overtaken by death and deprived of all things! Ah, with what pain and remorse will the goods of this world be regarded on the bed of death, by those who have been unduly attached to them! To worldlings who are spiritually blind the goods of this present life appear great; but death will discover what they really are, -- dust, smoke, and vanity. In the light of this last candle all the dazzling grandeur of this world will vanish and disappear. The greatest fortunes, the highest honours, when considered on the bed of death, will lose all their value and splendour. The shadow of death will obscure even crowns and sceptres.

Grant me, O God, Thy holy grace, for this alone is all I de-

sire. I am grieved for having ever despised such a treasure. Jesus, have pity on me.

II.

Of what avail, then, will riches be at the hour of death, when nothing will remain for us but a wooden coffin and a winding-sheet? Of what avail will be the honours which we have acquired; when no others will now remain for us but a funeral procession and a tomb, which will not be able to afford us the least satisfaction, if our souls should be lost? And of what avail will the beauty of the body be; when the body itself will become a mass of worms, infect the air with its stench, and excite horror in all who behold it?

My dear Redeemer, although I knew that by sinning I would forfeit Thy friendship, yet did I sin; but I hope for pardon from Thee Who hast died to purchase pardon for me. O that I had never offended Thee, my good God! I behold the love which Thou hast shown me; and this increases my grief for having displeased Thee Who art so good a Father. I love Thee, O Lord, and will never live without loving Thee; give me perseverance. Mary, my Mother, pray to Jesus for me.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"IN MUCH TRIBULATION WITH JOY OF THE HOLY GHOST." (Epistle of Sunday. 1 Thess. 1, 2-10)

"The Cross of Christ," says St. John Chrysostom, "is the key of Paradise." *Crux Christi clavis Paradisi*. But it is necessary, says the Saint, to bear tribulations in peace. If we wish to be saved we must submit to trials. *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God* (Acts xiv. 21).

I.

It is necessary, says St. John Chrysostom, to bear tribulations in peace; for if you accept them with resignation you shall gain great merit; but if with reluctance, you will increase instead of diminishing your misery. If we wish to be saved we must submit to trials. To holy souls the most severe afflictions are the temptations by which the devil impels them to offend God: but they who bear these temptations with patience, and banish them

by turning to God for help, shall acquire great merit. *And*, says St. Paul, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with the temptation issue that you may be able to bear it* (1 Cor. x. 13). God permits us to be molested by temptations, that, by banishing them, we may gain greater merit. *Blessed*, says the Lord, *are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted* (Matt. v. 5). They are *blessed*, because, according to the Apostle, our tribulations are momentary and very light compared with the greatness of the eternal glory, they shall obtain for us in Heaven. *For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory* (2 Cor. iv. 17). A great servant of God used to say, that Paradise is the home of the poor, of the persecuted, of the humble and afflicted. Hence, St. Paul says: *Patience is necessary for you, that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise* (Heb. x. 36). Speaking of the tribulations of the Saints, St. Cyprian asks: "What are they to the servants of God, whom Paradise invites?" Is it much for thee, to whom the eternal goods of Heaven are promised, to embrace the short afflictions of this life?

II.

When, then, God sends us tribulations, let us say with Job: *I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved* (Job xxxiii. 27). O Lord, my sins merit far greater chastisement than that which Thou hast inflicted on me. We should even pray with St. Augustine: "Here burn, here cut: spare not here that Thou mayest spare in eternity." How frightful is the chastisement of the sinner of whom the Lord says: *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice* (Is. xxvi. 10). Let us abstain from chastising the impious: as long as they remain in this life they will continue to live in sin, and shall thus be punished with eternal torments. On this passage St. Bernard says: "Lord, I do not wish for such mercy, for such commiseration is worse than Thy anger!"

The man whom the Lord afflicts in this life has a certain proof that he is dear to God. *And*, said the Angel to Tobias, *because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptations should prove thee* (Tob. xii. 13). Hence, St. James pronounces the

man blessed who is afflicted; because after he shall have been proved by tribulation, *he will receive the crown of life* (James i. 12).

He who wishes to share in the glory of the Saints, must suffer in this life as the Saints have suffered. None of the Saints have been esteemed or treated well by the world -- all of them have been despised and persecuted. In them have been verified the words of the Apostle: *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution* (2 Tim. iii. 12).

Great, indeed, are the advantages of tribulations. Indeed, as St. John Chrysostom says, "The Cross of Christ is the key of Paradise." *Crux Christi clavis Paradisi*. For all these afflictions, sorrows, persecutions and tears will one day have an end, and will, if we save our souls, become to us sources of joy and happiness in the Kingdom of Bliss.

Spiritual Reading

HOW TO SUFFER TRIBULATIONS WITH MERIT FOR ETERNITY

He who suffers tribulations in this world should, in the first place, abandon sin, and endeavour to recover the grace of God; for as long as he remains in sin, the merit of all his suffering is lost. *If*, says St. Paul, *I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* (1 Cor. xiii. 3). If you suffered all the torments of the Martyrs, or were burned alive, and were not in the state of grace, it would profit you nothing.

But to those who can suffer with God, and with resignation for God's sake, all the tribulations shall be a source of comfort and gladness. *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy* (Jo. xvi. 20). Hence, after having been insulted and beaten by the Jews, the Apostles departed from the Council full of joy; because they had been maltreated for the love of Jesus Christ. *And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus* (Acts v. 41). Hence, when God visits us with any tribulations, we must say with Jesus Christ: *The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* (Jo. xviii. 11). It is necessary to know that every tribulation, though it may come from men, is sent to us by God.

When we are surrounded on all sides with tribulations, and know not what to do, we must turn to God, Who alone can con-

sole us. Thus King Josaphat in his distress, said to the Lord: *As we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee* (2 Par. xx. 12). Thus David also in his tribulation had recourse to God, and God consoled him: *In my trouble I cried to the Lord and he heard me* (Ps. cxix. 1). We should turn to God and pray to Him, and never cease to pray till He hears us. *As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God until he have mercy on us* (Ps. cxxii. 2). We must keep our eyes continually raised to God, and must continue to implore His aid, until He is moved to compassion for our miseries. We must have great confidence in the Heart of Jesus Christ, and should not imitate certain persons, who at once lose courage if they do not feel they are heard as soon as they begin to pray. To them may be applied the words of the Saviour to St. Peter: *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?* (Matt. xiv. 31). When the favours which we ask are spiritual, or can be profitable to our souls, we should be certain of being heard, provided we persevere in prayer, and do not lose confidence. *All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you* (Mark xi. 24). In tribulations, then, we should never cease to hope with confidence that the Divine mercy will console us; and if our afflictions continue, we must say with Job: *Although he should kill me, I will trust in him* (Job xiii. 15).

Souls of little faith, instead of turning to God in their tribulations, have recourse to human means, and thus provoke God's anger, and remain in their miseries. *Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it* (Ps. cxxvi. 1). On this passage St. Augustine writes: "He builds up; He enlightens our understanding; He leads us to Faith; and still we labour as though we were the master-workers!" All good, all help, must come from the Lord. Without Him creatures can give us no assistance.

The Lord complains by the mouth of His Prophet: *Is not the Lord in Sion?... Why then have they provoked me to wrath with their idols... Is there no balm in Galaad, or is there no physician there? Why then is not the wound of the daughter of my people closed?* (Jer. viii. 22). Am I not in Sion? Why then do men provoke me to anger by recurring to creatures which they convert into idols by

placing in them all their hopes? Do they seek a remedy for their miseries? Why do they not seek it in Galaad, a mountain full of balsamic ointments which signify the Divine mercy? There they can find the Physician and the remedy for all their evils. Why, then, says the Lord, do your wounds remain open? Why are they not healed? It is because you have not recourse to Me but to creatures, and because you confide in them and not in Me.

In another place the Lord says: *Am I become a wilderness to Israel, or a lateward springing land? Why then have my people said: We are revolted; we will come to thee no more?... But my people have forgotten me days without number.* (Jer. ii. 31). Why, My children, do you say that you will have recourse to Me no more? Am I become to you a barren land, which gives no fruit, or gives it too late? Is it for this reason that you have so long forgotten Me? By these complaints He manifests to us His desire that we pray to Him in order that He may be able to give us His graces. And He also gives us to understand that when we pray to Him, He is not slow, but instantly begins to assist us.

The Lord, says David, is not asleep when we turn to His Goodness, and ask the graces which are profitable to our souls. He hears us immediately, because He is anxious for our welfare. *Behold he shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel* (Ps. cxx. 4). When we pray for temporal favours, St. Bernard says that God "will give what we ask, or something more useful." He will grant us the grace which we desire, whenever it is profitable to our souls; or He will give us a more useful grace, such as the grace to resign ourselves to the Divine will, and to suffer with patience our tribulations, so as to merit a great increase of glory in Heaven.

Evening Meditation

PRAYING FOR OTHERS - ESPECIALLY POOR SINNERS
I.

Making a remembrance of you in our prayers without ceasing (Ep. of Sunday).

How pleasing to Jesus Christ are prayers for sinners! "Assist Me, O My daughter, to save souls by your prayers," -- said Jesus one day to Sister Seraphina de Capri. No souls that really love God neglect to pray for poor sinners.

It is quite certain that the prayers of others are of great use to sinners, and are very pleasing to God. And God complains of His servants who do not recommend sinners to Him, as He once complained to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to whom He said: "*See, my daughter, how Christians are in the devil's hands: if My elect did not deliver them by their prayers they would be devoured.*" But God especially requires this of Priests and Religious. The same Saint used to say to her nuns: "My sisters, God has not separated us from the world that we should only do good for ourselves, but also that we should appease Him in behalf of sinners." And God one day said to her, "I have given to you, My chosen spouses, the City of Refuge (*i.e.* the Passion of Jesus Christ), that you may have a place where you may obtain help for My creatures. Therefore have recourse to it and thence stretch forth a helping hand to My creatures who are perishing, and even lay down your lives for them." For this reason the Saint, inflamed with holy zeal, used to offer God the Blood of the Redeemer fifty times a day on behalf of sinners, and was quite consumed with the desire she had for their conversion. She used to say "What pain it is, O Lord, to see how one could help Thy creatures by giving one's life for them, and not be able to do so!" In every exercise she recommended sinners to God; and it is written in her life that she scarcely passed an hour in the day without praying for them. Frequently, too, she arose in the middle of the night, and went before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for them; and yet for all this, when she was once found bathed in tears, on being asked the cause, she answered, "Because I seem to myself to do nothing for the salvation of sinners." She went so far as to offer to endure even the pains of hell for their conversion, provided that in that place she might still love God; and often God gratified her by inflicting on her grievous pains and infirmities for the salvation of sinners. She prayed especially for Priests, seeing that their good life was the occasion of salvation to others, while their bad life was the cause of ruin to many; and therefore she prayed God to visit their faults upon her, saying, "Lord, make me die and return to life again as many times as is necessary to satisfy Thy justice for them!" And it is related in her Life that the Saint, by her prayers, did indeed release many souls from the hands of

Lucifer.

I thank Thee, O Lord, for the sweet promise of pardon Thou hast made to sinners, -- to forget the sins of those who repent. *I will not remember any of their iniquities.* (Ezech. xviii. 22). It is all the fruit of Thy Passion, O Jesus! O sweet Passion! O sweet mercy! O sweet love of Jesus Christ!

II.

No souls that really love God neglect to pray for poor sinners. For how is it possible for a person who loves God, and knows what love He has for our souls, and what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for their salvation, and how our Saviour desires us to pray for sinners, -- how is it possible, I say, that he should be able to look with indifference on the multitudes of poor souls who are living without God, and are slaves of hell, without being moved to importune God with frequent prayers to give light and strength to those wretched beings so that they may rise from the miserable state of perdition in which they are slumbering? True it is that God has not promised to grant our requests when those for whom we pray put a positive impediment in the way of their conversion; but still, God of His goodness has often deigned, at the Prayer of His servants, to bring back the most blind and obstinate sinners to a state of salvation by means of extraordinary graces. Therefore let us never omit, when we say or hear Mass, when we receive Holy Communion, when we make our Meditation or the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, to recommend poor sinners to God. And a learned author says that he who prays for others will find that his prayers for himself are heard much sooner.

Oh, how many souls are sometimes converted, not so much by sermons, as by the prayers of Religious. *Pray for one another that you may be saved, for the continual prayer of the just man availeth much.* (James v. 16).

O great God, Thou art indignant against sinners and with too great reason, for they repay Thee with ingratitude for all the great love Thou hast shown them. I offer Thee Thine own Son. May this Victim appease Thee and move Thee to have pity on all poor sinners. Give them light and strength to come out of the miserable state in which they are blindly living. I pray Thee

for all, but especially for myself who have been more ungrateful than others in offending and despising Thee.

O Mary, hope of sinners, do thou obtain pardon for me, perseverance, and the love of Jesus Christ.

Monday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

VANITAS VANITATUM

I. -- THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE WORTHLESS.

We cannot call the things of this life *ours* because we cannot take them with us into eternity. Where is the rich man that ever brought with him a piece of money? What king has ever carried with him a shred of his purple? Of what use, then, is it to us to gain the whole world if at death we lose all by losing our souls?

I.

What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? (Matt. xvi., 26).

An ancient Philosopher called Aristippus was once shipwrecked and lost all his goods. When he reached the shore, the people, through respect for his great learning, presented him with an equivalent of all he had lost. He wrote to his friends, exhorting them to imitate his example, and to seek only the goods which cannot be wrested from them by shipwreck. Now, our relatives and friends who are in eternity exhort us from the other world to attend only to the acquisition of goods which even death cannot take from us. Death is called *the day of destruction* (Deut. xxxii. 35). It is the day of destruction, because on that day we shall lose all the goods of this earth, its honours, riches and pleasures. Hence, according to St. Ambrose, we cannot call the things of this life *ours*, because we cannot take them with us into eternity. Our virtues alone accompany us to the next life.

What, then, says Jesus Christ, does it profit us to gain the whole world, if, at death we lose all by losing the soul? Ah! how many young men has this great maxim sent into the cloister! How many anchorites has it sent into the desert! And how many Martyrs has it encouraged to give their life for Jesus Christ! By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God,

particularly the soul of St. Francis Xavier who was then in Paris attached to the things of the world. "Francis," said the Saint one day, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform. And though it should fulfil all its promises, it can never content your heart. But let us grant that it did make you happy, how long will the happiness last? Can it last longer than your life; and after death what will you take with you into eternity? Where is the rich man that has ever brought with him a piece of money, or a servant to attend him? What king has ever carried with him a shred of the purple as a badge of royalty?" At these words St. Francis abandoned the world, followed St. Ignatius, and became a Saint.

Ah, Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee for making me see my folly and the evil I have done in turning my back on Thee Who hast given Thy Blood and Thy life for me. Thou didst not deserve to be treated by me as I have treated Thee. Behold! if death now came upon me, what should I find but sin and remorse of conscience, which would make me die with great disquietude! My Saviour, I confess that I have done evil, and committed a great error in leaving Thee, my Sovereign Good, for the miserable pleasures of this world. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Ah! through the sorrow which took away Thy life on the Cross, give me a sorrow for my sins which will make me weep during the remainder of my life over the injuries I have done Thee. My Jesus, pardon me; I promise to displease Thee no more, and to love Thee forever.

II.

Solomon confessed that *whatsoever his eyes desired he refused them not* (Eccles. ii. 10); but after having indulged in all the pleasures of this earth, he called the goods of the world *vanity of vanities - vanitas vanitatum*. Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph used to say: "Of what use are kingdoms at the hour of death?" The Saints tremble at the thought of the uncertainty of their eternal salvation. Father Paul Segneri trembled and, full of terror, said to his confessor: "Father, what do you think -- shall I be saved?" St. Andrew Avellino trembled and, with a torrent of tears, said: "Who knows whether I shall be saved or lost?" St. Louis Bertrand

was so much terrified by this thought, that, during the night, in a fit of terror, he sprang out of bed, saying: "Perhaps I shall be lost!" And sinners, living in a state of damnation, sleep, and jest, and laugh!

O my Jesus, I am not worthy of Thy love which I have hitherto so much despised. But Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee. I love Thee! Love me, then, O Lord! I do not wish to be any longer at enmity with Thee. I renounce all the grandeurs and pleasures of the world, provided Thou lovest me. Hear me, O my God, for the love of Jesus Christ! He entreats Thee not to banish me from Thy Heart. To Thee I consecrate my whole being; to Thee I consecrate my life, and my joys, my senses, my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. Accept me; reject not my offering as I have deserved for having so often refused Thy friendship: *cast me not away from thy face* (Ps. 1. 13). Most holy Virgin, my Mother, Mary, pray to Jesus for me. In thy intercession I place unbounded confidence.

Spiritual Reading

A CHRISTIAN'S RULE OF LIFE

I. -- THE MEANS WE MUST MAKE USE OF TO PERSEVERE IN THE GRACE OF GOD

We must be fully persuaded, that in order to obtain eternal salvation, it is not sufficient *to wish* to be saved; but we must *take the means* which have been left us by Jesus Christ. Otherwise, if we commit sins, it will not avail us in the Day of Judgment to excuse ourselves by saying that the temptations were great and we were weak; because God has given us the means, through His grace, to conquer all the assaults of our enemies. If, then, we will not take advantage of them, and are overcome, the fault is our own. All men desire to be saved; but because they omit to employ the means of salvation, they sin, and are lost.

I. -- TO AVOID THE OCCASIONS OF SIN

The first means is, *to avoid all occasions of sin*. It is impossible for any one who does not endeavour to fly from the occasions of sin, especially in the matter of sensual pleasures, to avoid falling into sin. St. Philip Neri said: "In the war of the senses, the conquerors are the *cowards* who fly." The occasion is like a veil put before our eyes, so that we can see nothing else -- neither God,

nor hell, nor the resolutions we have made. The Scripture says it is impossible for a man to walk on burning coals without being burnt: *Or can he walk upon hot coals and his feet not be burnt?* (Prov. vi. 28). So it is morally impossible for any one to put himself voluntarily into the occasion of sin and not to fall, although he may have made a thousand resolutions and a thousand promises to God. This is clearly shown every day by the misery of so many poor souls who are plunged into vice for not avoiding the occasions. Any one who has had the evil habit of sins of impurity must know that, in order to restrain himself, it is not enough merely to avoid those occasions which are absolutely proximate; for if he does not also fly from those which are not altogether proximate, he will easily fall again. Nor must we allow ourselves to be deceived by the devil into thinking that the person towards whom we are tempted is a saint. It often happens that the more devout a person is, the stronger is the temptation. St. Thomas Aquinas says, that the holiest persons attract the most. The temptation will commence in a spiritual way, and will terminate carnally. The great servant of God, F. Sertorio Caputo of the Society of Jesus, said that the devil first induces one to love a person's virtue, then the person, and then blinds a man and brings him to ruin. We must also fly from evil companions: we are too weak; the devil is continually tempting us and the senses drawing us to evil; the slightest suggestion of a bad companion is alone wanting to make us fall. Therefore the first thing that we have to do to save ourselves is to avoid evil occasions and bad companions. And we must in this matter use violence with ourselves, resolutely overcoming all human respect. Those who do not use violence with themselves will not be saved. It is true, that we must not put confidence in our own strength, but only in the Divine assistance; but God wills that we should do *our part* in using violence with ourselves, when it is necessary to do so, in order to gain Paradise: *The violent bear it away* (Matt. xi. 12).

II. -- MENTAL PRAYER

The second means is *mental prayer*. Without this, the soul will find it almost impossible to remain a length of time in the grace of God. The Holy Spirit says: *In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin* (Ecclus. vii. 40). He who often meditates

on the Four Last Things, namely Death, Judgment, and the Eternity of hell and Paradise, will not fall into sin. These truths are not to be seen with the bodily eyes, but only with the eyes of the mind. If they are not meditated on, they vanish from the mind, and then the pleasures of the senses present themselves, and those who do not keep before themselves the eternal truths are easily taken up by them; and this is why so many abandon themselves to vice, and are damned. Christians know and believe that they must all die, and all be judged; but because they do not think about it, they live far from God. Without *mental prayer* there is no light, we walk in the dark; and walking in the dark, we do not see the danger we are in, we do not make use of the means we ought, nor pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Without prayer we have neither light nor strength to advance in the ways of God; because without prayer we do not ask God to give us His grace, and without His graces we shall certainly fall. It was for this reason that Blessed Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian *who did not meditate* to persevere in the grace of God. Whereas one who makes his Meditation every day can scarcely fall into sin; and if unhappily he should fall on some occasion, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God, that "*mental prayer* and *mortal sin* cannot exist together." Resolve, then, to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening, -- but it is best in the morning, -- half an hour's Meditation. It is sufficient that during the half hour you should entertain your thoughts by reading some book of Meditations, and from time to time to excite some good affection or aspiration. Above all, I beg you never to leave off this prayer (which you should practise at least once a day), although you may be in great aridity, and should feel great weariness in doing it. If you do not discontinue it, you will certainly be saved.

Together with prayer, it is of great use to make in private a Spiritual Reading out of some book which treats of the life of a Saint or of the Christian virtues, during half, or at least a quarter, of an hour. How many by reading a pious book have changed their way of living and become Saints! -- like St. John Colombino, St. Ignatius Loyola, and so many others. It would be

also a most useful thing if you were every year to make a Retreat in some Religious House. *But at any rate do not omit your daily Meditation.*

Evening Meditation

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE DEVIL.

I.

He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved (Matt. xxiv. 13).

St. Jerome says that many begin well but few persevere. Saul, Judas, Tertullian, began well, but ended badly because they did not persevere in grace. The Lord, says St. Jerome, requires not only the beginning of a good life, but also the end: it is the end that will be rewarded. St. Bonaventure says that the crown is given only to perseverance. Hence St. Laurence Justinian calls perseverance the "Gate of Heaven." No one can enter Paradise unless He finds the gate of Heaven. You have now renounced sin, and justly hope that you have been pardoned. You are, then, the friend of God: but remember that you are not yet saved. And when will you be saved? When you will have persevered to the end. *He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.* Have you begun a good life? Thank the Lord for it: but St. Bernard warns you that to him who begins, a reward is only *promised*, and is *given* to him alone who perseveres. It is not enough to run for the prize; you must run till you win it. *So run*, says St. Paul, *that you may obtain* (1 Cor. ix. 24).

You have already put your hand to the plough, and you have begun to live well; but now you must tremble and fear more than ever. *With fear and trembling work out your salvation* (Phil. ii. 12). And why? Because if -- which God forbid -- you now look back and return to a life of sin, God will declare you unfit for Paradise. *No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke ix. 62). At present, through the grace of God, you avoid evil occasions, you frequent the Sacraments, and make Meditation every day. Happy you if you continue to do so, and if, when He comes to judge you, Jesus Christ will find you doing these things. *Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing* (Matt. xxiv. 46). But do not imagine now that you have begun to serve God, there is, as it were, an

end or a lessening of temptations. Listen to the advice of the Holy Ghost. *Son, when thou comest to the service of God ... prepare thy soul for temptations* (Ecclus. ii. 1) Remember that now more than ever you must prepare yourself for conflicts, because your enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, will arm themselves now more than ever to fight against you in order to deprive you of all that you have acquired.

Ah my God, *cast me not away from thy face!* I know that Thou wilt never abandon me, unless I first abandon Thee. Experience of my own weakness makes me tremble lest I should again forsake Thee. Lord, it is from Thee I must receive the strength necessary to conquer hell, which labours to make me again its slave. This strength I ask of Thee for the sake of Jesus Christ.

II.

Denis the Carthusian says that the more a soul gives itself to God, the more strenuously hell labours to destroy it. And this is sufficiently expressed in the Gospel of St. Luke, where Jesus Christ says: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest, and not finding it, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he is come he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first* (Luke xi. 24). When banished from a soul, the devil finds no repose, and does everything in his power to return: he even calls companions to his aid; and if he succeeds in re-entering, the second fall of that soul will be far more ruinous than the first.

Consider, then, what arms you must use in order to defend yourselves against these enemies, and to preserve your soul in the grace of God. To escape defeat, and to conquer the devil, there is no other defence than prayer. St. Paul says that we have to contend, not with men of flesh and blood like ourselves, but with the princes of hell. *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers* (Eph. vi. 12). By these words the Apostle wishes to admonish us that we have not strength to resist such powerful enemies, and that we stand in need of aid from God. With His aid we shall be able to do all things. *I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13). Such is the

language of St. Paul; such, too, should be our language. But this Divine aid is given only to those who pray for it. *Ask and you shall receive*. Let us, then, not trust to our purposes of amendment. If we trust in them, we shall be lost. Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the Divine assistance, and let us recommend ourselves to Jesus Christ and to the Most Holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly when tempted against chastity; for this is the most terrible of all temptations, and is the one by which the devil gains the most victories. We have not strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God. *And*, said Solomon, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, ... I went to the Lord, and besought him* (Wis. viii. 21). In such temptations, then, we must instantly have recourse to Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, frequently invoking the most holy Names of Jesus and Mary. He who does this will conquer; he who neglects it will be lost.

O my Saviour, establish between Thee and me a perpetual peace, which will never be broken for all eternity. For this purpose I ask Thy love. He who loves not is dead. O God of my soul, it is by Thee I must be saved from this unhappy death. I was lost; Thou knowest it. It is Thy goodness alone which has brought me into the state in which I am at present, in which I hope I am Thy friend. Ah, my Jesus, through the painful death Thou didst suffer for my salvation, do not permit me ever more to lose Thee voluntarily. I love Thee above all things. I hope to see myself always bound with this holy love, to die in the bonds of love and to live forever in the chains of Thy love. O Mary, thou art called the Mother of perseverance: through thee this great gift is dispensed. Through thy intercession I ask and hope to obtain it.

Tuesday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE CONTEMPTIBLE.

St. Augustine bids us to regard not what the rich man possessed in life but what he took with him in death, -- a fetid body and a rag of garment to rot with him. We should labour to become Saints, rich in those goods that will accompany us into

the other world and content us for all eternity.

I.

There is a deceitful balance in his hand (Osee xii. 7). We must weigh things in the balance of God, and not in the deceitful balance of the world. The goods of this life are miserable goods; they do not content the heart; they soon end. *My days have been swifter than a post: they have passed by as ships carrying fruits* (Job ix. 25, 26). The days of our life pass and fly away, and of all the pleasures of this earth, what remains? They have passed like a ship which leaves no trace behind! *As a ship that passeth through the waters, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found* (Wis. v. 10). Ask the many rich and learned of the world, the many princes and emperors who are now in eternity, what they possess of all the pomps and delights and grandeur they enjoyed in this life? They all answer: Nothing! Nothing! "O man," says St. Augustine, "you attend to what he had here; but attend rather to what he brings with him." You, says the Saint, regard only the goods the rich man possessed; but observe what he took with him at death, -- a fetid body and a rag of garment to rot with him.

After death the grandees of the world are spoken of for a little while; but they are soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise* (Ps. ix. 7). And if they have gone to hell, what do they do and say in that place of woe? They weep and say: *What hath pride profited us? Or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow* (Wis. v., 8, 9). What have pomps and riches profited us now that they are passed away like a shadow and for us nothing remains but eternal torments, wailing and despair?

Ah, my Redeemer, Thou hast suffered so many pains and ignominies for my sake; and I have loved the pleasures and vanities of this earth to such an excess, that, for sake of them I have often trampled on Thy grace. But, since Thou didst not cease to seek after me when I despised Thee, I cannot, O my Jesus, fear that Thou wilt now cast me away, when I seek and love Thee with my whole heart, and am more sorry for having offended Thee than for any other misfortune. O God of my soul, from this day forward I wish never more to offend Thee, even by a

venial thought. Make known to me what is displeasing to Thee. I will not, for any earthly good, do what I know to be offensive to Thee. Make known to me what I must do in order to please Thee. I am ready to do it. I wish to love Thee with a true love.

II.

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light (Luke xvi. 8). How prudent are worldlings in earthly affairs! What toils do they endure in order to obtain a situation, or to acquire an estate! With what care do they attend to the preservation of bodily health! They adopt the safest means, they select the best physicians, the best remedies, the purest air. But how careless are they about the concerns of the soul! And it is certain that health, situations, and possessions shall one day end; but the soul and eternity are everlasting. What do not the unjust, the vindictive, and voluptuous endure in order to attain their wicked purposes! And for their souls, they will suffer nothing! O God, in the light of the death-candle, worldlings know and confess their folly! Then they say: Oh, that I had left the world, and led a life of sanctity! Pope Leo the Eleventh said at the hour of death: *It were better for me to have been Brother Porter in my convent, than to be Pope*. Honorius the Third also said in his last illness: It would have been better for me to have remained in the kitchen of my Monastery to wash the plates. In his dying moments, Philip the Second, King of Spain, sent for his son, and throwing off his royal robes, showed him his breast eaten away by worms, and said to him: "Prince, behold how we die and how the grandeurs of this world end. Oh, that I had been a Lay Brother in some Religious community, and not a king." He then ordered a wooden cross to be fastened round his neck by a cord, and having made all his arrangements for death, he said to his son: "I wished you to be present at this scene, that you may see how this world treats monarchs in the end. Their death is like that of the poorest subjects. In short, he who leads the most holy life is in the greatest favour with God." This same son, who was afterwards Philip the Third, dying at the age of forty-three years, said: "My subjects, in the sermon to be delivered at my funeral, let nothing be preached but this spectacle you now behold. Say that to be king, serves at death to excite regret and pain." He

then exclaimed: "Oh, that I had never been a king! Oh, that I had lived in a desert to serve God! I should now go with greater confidence to present myself at God's tribunal, and should not now find myself in danger of being damned for ever." But these desires at the hour of death serve only to increase the anguish and despair of those who have not loved God. "Therefore," says St. Teresa, "we should make no account of what ends with life; the true life consists in living in such a manner as not to have any reason to fear death." If, then, we wish to see the true value of earthly things, let us look at them from the bed of death, and say: These honours, these amusements, shall one day have an end: we ought, then, to labour to become Saints and rich in those goods alone which will accompany us into the other world, and content us for all eternity.

O my Jesus, I wish to make peace with Thee and to desire Thy grace more than any earthly good. For Thy sake I now renounce all the pleasures the world can give and I resolve to lose all rather than Thy grace. I embrace, O Lord, all the pains and crosses which shall come to me from Thy hands: give me the resignation which I stand in need of: *here burn, here cut*. Chastise me in this life, that in the next I may love Thee for ever. Mary, my Mother, to you I recommend my soul; do not ever cease to pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading

A CHRISTIAN'S RULE OF LIFE

Means of Perseverance (continued)

III. -- THE FREQUENTATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

The Third means is *the frequenting of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion*. By Confession the soul keeps itself purified; and by it not only obtains remission of sins, but also greater strength to resist temptations. For this purpose you should choose a spiritual director, and always confess to the same, consulting him on all more important matters, even in regard to your temporal affairs; and obey him in everything, especially if you are distressed by scruples. He who obeys his confessor need not fear he will go astray: *He that heareth you, heareth me* (Luke x. 16). The voice of the confessor is the voice of God.

Holy Communion is called Heavenly Bread, because as common bread preserves the life of the body, so Communion preserves the life of the soul: *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man ... you shall not have life in you* (Jo. vi. 54). On the other hand, to those who often eat this Bread eternal life is promised: *If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.* (Jo. vi. 52). Therefore the Council of Trent calls Holy Communion "the medicine which delivers us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal sin." You should, then, resolve to go to Communion at least once a week, being determined not to give it up for anything in the world; as there is no affair of greater importance than that of your eternal salvation. Indeed, the longer you remain in the world, the greater need you have of assistance, because your temptations are greater. He who communicates most frequently will be freest from sin and will make greatest progress in Divine love. Only let him communicate with a good intention.

In order to derive more abundant fruits from Communion, he should spend half an hour after receiving in devout acts of thanksgiving.

IV. -- TO HEAR MASS

The Fourth means is *to hear Mass every day*. When we attend Mass we give more honour to God than all the Angels and Saints in Heaven can give Him, because theirs is the honour of creatures; but in the Mass we offer to God Jesus Christ Who gives Him an infinite honour.

But what is of the greatest importance is that those who hear Mass should make a special application to their own souls of the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Mass should be heard for the same ends for which it was instituted: namely, (1) To honour Almighty God, (2) To thank Him for His benefits, (3) To make atonement for the punishment due to our sins, (4) to obtain Divine grace.

V. -- THE VISIT TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT AND TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

The Fifth means is *to make a Visit every day to the Most Holy Sacrament* in some church, and to the Divine Mother before some devout image. Jesus Christ dwells on the altars of so many churches in order to dispense graces to all who come to visit

Him; and thus the souls of those who practise this beautiful devotion receive innumerable benefits from it. The graces you ought especially to ask for, both from Jesus and Mary, are, the love of God, and holy perseverance till death.*

*In connection with what St. Alphonsus here lays down in regard to *Mass*, *Communion* and *Visit*, we recommend the Saint's own prayers for Mass and Communion and *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* which have been recently published in one small volume (C.T.S., D.). -- Ed.

VI. -- VOCAL PRAYER

The Sixth means which I recommend you above all to practise is *holy prayer*. It is certain that without the Divine assistance we can do nothing good for our souls. But God has declared that graces are granted only to those who ask for them: *Ask, and it shall be given you* (Matt. vii. 7). Therefore, as St. Teresa says, he who asks not does not receive. It is a common opinion of the Holy Fathers of the Church, with St. Thomas, that without prayer it is impossible to persevere in the grace of God and to save one's soul. But he who prays is sure of the help of God. We have His word for it which cannot fail, repeated so often in the Sacred Gospels: *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you* (Mark xi. 24). *Every one that asketh receiveth* (Luke xi. 10). *Amen, amen, I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you* (Jo. xvi. 23). God grants everything that we ask Him for in the Name of Jesus Christ. If, then, we wish to be saved, we must pray, and pray with *humility* and *confidence*, and above all with *perseverance*. And this is the reason why Meditation is so useful, because then we are reminded *to pray*; otherwise we forget to do so, and so are lost. St. Teresa says, that out of her desire of seeing everyone saved, she would have wished to go to the top of a mountain and then to cry out, so as to be heard by all men: "Pray! pray! pray!" The ancient Fathers of the desert in their conferences decided that there was no better means of saving ourselves than by continually repeating the prayer of David: *Incline unto my aid, O God! O Lord make haste to help me!* (Ps. lxi. 2). Let this be our prayer also. Or else let us make use of the beautiful ejaculation of St. Leonard of Port-Maurice: "My Jesus, mercy!" And the two

principal graces which we must always ask for are, the love of God and holy perseverance. We must always ask the same graces from the Most Holy Mary who is called the dispenser of all the Divine graces; and when we pray to her, she will certainly obtain them for us from God. Therefore St. Bernard thus exhorts us saying: "Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for what she seeks she finds, and she cannot be disappointed."*

*We most earnestly recommend to all St. Alphonsus' book, *Prayer, the Great Means of Salvation*. An excellent edition recently published. Dublin, Talbot Press. Ltd.; America, Herder & Co.
-- Ed.

Evening Meditation

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE WORLD.

Let us see how we must conquer the world. The devil is a great enemy of our salvation, but the world is a worse enemy. If the devil did not make use of the world and of wicked men (by whom we mean the world), he would not obtain the victories he gains. *But*, says Jesus Christ, *beware of men* (Matt. x. 17). Men are often worse than devils; for devils are put to flight when we pray and invoke the most holy Names of Jesus and Mary. But when a person gives a pious and becoming answer to wicked companions who tempt him to sin, they redouble their efforts, they treat him with ridicule, upbraiding him with vulgarity and want of education; and when they can say nothing else, they will call him a hypocrite who only pretends to sanctity. To escape such derision and reproach, certain weak souls miserably associate with these ministers of Lucifer, and return to the vomit. Be persuaded that if you wish to lead a holy life, you must expect the ridicule and contempt of the wicked. *The wicked*, says the Holy Ghost, *loathe them that are in the right way* (Prov. xxix. 27). He who lives in sin cannot bear the sight of those who live according to the Gospel. And why? Because their life is a continual reproach to him; and therefore to avoid the pain of remorse caused by the good example of others, he would wish that all should imitate his own wickedness. There is no remedy. The Apostle tells us that he who serves God will be persecuted by the world. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution* (2 Tim. iii. 12). All the Saints have been persecuted. Who was more holy than Jesus

Christ? The world persecuted Him so as to cause Him to bleed to death on a Cross.

There is no help for this; for the maxims of the world are absolutely opposed to the maxims of Jesus Christ. What the world esteems, Jesus Christ has called folly. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God* (1 Cor. iii. 19). And the world regards as folly what Jesus Christ has strongly recommended, -- such as crosses, pains and contempt. *For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 18). But if the wicked revile and reproach us, let us console ourselves with the reflection that God blesses and praises us. *They will curse, and thou wilt bless* (Ps. cviii. 28). Is it not enough for us to be praised by God, by Mary, by the Angels, the Saints, and all good men? Let us, then, leave sinners to say what they please, and let us continue to please God Who is grateful and faithful to all who serve Him. The greater the opposition and difficulty we meet in doing good, the more we shall please God and treasure up merits for ourselves. Let us imagine that we are alone with God in this world. When the wicked treat us with derision, let us recommend them to the Lord; let us thank Him for giving us the light which He does not give to these miserable men, and let us pursue our way. We must not be ashamed to appear like Christians; for, if we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, He protests that He will be ashamed of us on the Day of Judgment. *For he that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when he shall come in his majesty* (Luke ix. 26).

Henceforth, O my God, Thou shalt be my only Love, my only Good. O Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee final perseverance in Thy grace and in Thy love. I know that Thou wilt grant it to me whenever I ask it. But who assures me that I shall be ever careful to ask this perseverance from Thee? Hence, O my God, I ask perseverance, and the grace to ask it always. O Mary, my advocate, my refuge, and my hope, obtain for me by thy intercession, the gift of constancy in always asking of God the grace of final perseverance. Through the love which thou bearest Jesus Christ, I ask thee to obtain for me this gift.

II.

If we wish to save our souls, we must resolve to suffer, and to do violence to ourselves. *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life* (Matt. vii. 14). *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away* (Matt. xi. 12). He who does not violence to himself, will not be saved. There is no remedy, for if we wish to practise virtue, we must act in opposition to our rebellious nature. In the beginning, it is particularly necessary to do violence to ourselves in order to root out bad habits, and to acquire virtuous habits. When good habits are once acquired, the observance of the Divine law becomes easy and even sweet. Our Lord said to St. Bridget that when in the practice of virtue a person suffers the first prickings of the thorns with patience and courage, these thorns afterwards become roses. Be careful, then, beloved Christian; Jesus Christ now says to you what He said to the paralytic: *Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee* (Jo. v. 14). Remember, says St. Bernard, that if you should have the misfortune to relapse into sin, your *relapse* will be more disastrous than in your first *fall*. Woe, says the Lord, to them who begin to walk in the way of God and afterwards forsake it. *Woe to you apostate children* (Is. xxx. 1). Such sinners are punished as rebels against God's light. *They have been rebellious to the light* (Job xxiv. 13). The chastisement of these rebels who have been favoured by God with great light, and have been afterwards unfaithful to Him, is to remain in blindness, and thus die in their sins. *But if the just man turn himself away from his justice ... shall he live? All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die*, (Ezech. xviii. 24).

Ah, my God, such a chastisement I have often deserved, because I have, through the light which Thou gavest me, renounced sin, and have miserably returned to it. I thank Thy infinite mercy for not having abandoned me in my blindness by leaving me entirely destitute of light, as I have deserved. Great, then, O my Jesus, are my obligations to Thee, and great should be my ingratitude, were I again to turn my back upon Thee. No, my Redeemer, the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I hope that during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity, I will always sing and praise Thy mercies by loving Thee always,

and never more seeing myself deprived of Thy graces. The great ingratitude with which I have hitherto treated Thee, and which I now hate and curse above every evil, will serve to make me weep bitterly over the injuries I have done Thee, and to inflame me still more with the love of Thee, Who, after I had given Thee so many grievous offences, hast bestowed upon me so many great graces. Yes, I love Thee, O my God, worthy of infinite love.

Wednesday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

WE MUST WORK FOR HEAVEN.

What is our life on this earth but a scene that ends very soon and passes away? *The fashion of this world passeth away.* The world is a stage; one generation passes away, another appears! "Thus end the grandeurs and crowns of this world!" exclaimed Francis Borgia, "Henceforth I will serve a Master Who can never die!"

I.

The time is short: it remaineth that ... they that use this world be as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. vii. 29, 31). What is our life on this earth but a scene which passes away and ends very soon? *The fashion of this world passeth away.* "The world," says Cornelius a Lapide, "is like a stage; one generation passes away, another appears." He who acts the part of a king, takes not the purple with him. O villa, O house, tell me how many masters hast thou had? Ah, when the comedy is over, the king is no longer king; the master ceases to be master. You at present are in the possession of such a villa, such a palace; but death will come, and they will pass to other masters.

The affliction of an hour maketh one forget great delights (Ecclus. xi. 29). The gloomy hour of death brings to an end and makes us forget all the grandeur, the nobility, the pomp of the world. Casimir, King of Poland, while he sat at a table with the nobles of his kingdom, died in the act of raising a cup to his lips, -- and the scene ended for him! In seven days after his election, the Emperor Celsus was killed, -- and the scene closed for Celsus! Ladislaus, King of Poland, in his eighteenth year, while he was preparing for the reception of his bride, the daughter of the King of France, was suddenly seized with a violent pain, which

soon deprived him of life. Couriers were instantly despatched to announce to her that the scene was over for Ladislaus, and that she might return to France. By meditating on the vanity of the world, Francis Borgia became a Saint. At the sight of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the midst of worldly grandeur and in the flower of youth, he, as has been already said, resolved to give himself entirely to God. "Thus, then," he said, "end the grandeurs and crowns of this world! I will henceforth serve a Master Who can never die!"

Ah, my God, I do not wish that the devil have any longer dominion over my soul; I wish that Thou alone be the Lord and Master of it. I will renounce all things in order to acquire Thy grace. I esteem it more than a thousand thrones and a thousand kingdoms. And whom shall I love but Thee, Who art infinitely amiable, an infinite Good, infinite Beauty, Bounty, and Love?

II.

Let us endeavour to live in such a manner that what was said to the fool in the Gospel may not be said to us at the hour of death: *Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* (Luke xii. 20). Hence the Redeemer adds: *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God* (Luke xii. 21). Again Christ tells you to acquire the riches, not of the world, but of God; -- of virtues and merits, which are goods that will remain with you for eternity in Heaven. *Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume* (Matt. vi. 20). Let us, then, labour to acquire the great treasure of Divine love. "What has the rich man if he has not charity?" asks St. Augustine, "and what does the poor man need, if he has charity?" If a man had all the riches in the world, and has not God, he is the poorest of men. But the poor man who possesses God, possesses all things. And who are they that possess God? *He*, says St. John, *that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him* (1 Jo. iv. 16).

Hitherto, O Lord God, I have left Thee for creatures: this is and always shall be to me a source of sorrow piercing my heart with grief for having offended Thee Who hast loved me with so much tenderness. But since Thou hast favoured me with so many graces, I can no longer bear to see myself without Thy

love. O my Love, take possession of my whole will, and of all that I possess, and do with me what Thou pleasest. If I have hitherto been impatient under adversity, I ask pardon. O my Lord, I will never complain of Thy arrangements; I know that they are all holy, all for my welfare. Treat me, O my God, as Thou willest; I promise to be always content, always thankful to Thee. Make me love Thee, and I ask no more. What goods, what honours, what world can I love? O God! O God! I wish only for God! Happy thee, O Mary, who loved nothing in the world but God. Obtain for me the grace to imitate thee, at least during the remainder of my life. In thee I trust.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

I. -- THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY

No one can please God without being humble, for God cannot bear the proud. He has promised to hear those who pray to Him; but if a proud man prays to Him, the Lord hears him not. To the humble, on the contrary, He dispenses His graces: *God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble* (James iv. 6). Humility is of two kinds: humility of the *intellect*, and humility of the *will* or of the *heart*. The former consists in the conviction we have of our own wretchedness, -- that we can neither know nor do anything but what is evil. All that we have and do that is good comes from God.

With regard to the practice of humility of the *intellect*: First, we must put no confidence in our own strength, nor in our own resolutions; but we must be always diffident and tremble for ourselves: *With fear and trembling work out your salvation* (Phil. ii. 12). St. Philip Neri said: "He who fears not is sure to fall."

Secondly, we must not glory in what belongs to us, such as our natural abilities, our good actions, our birth, our relatives, and the like. It is therefore well never to speak of our actions, except to confess where we have been wrong. It is better still not to speak of ourselves at all, either in praise or blame; because, even when we blame ourselves, it is often an occasion of vain-glory, by making us think that we shall be praised, or at least pass as humble, and thus humility becomes pride.

Thirdly, let us not be angry with ourselves after a fault. That

would not be humility, but pride; and even a device of the devil to take away our confidence, and make us turn from a good life. When we see that we have fallen, we should say with St. Catherine of Genoa: "*Lord, behold these are the fruits of my own garden.*" Then let us humble ourselves, and rise immediately from our fault by an act of love and contrition, resolving not to fall again, and trusting in the help of God. And if we do unhappily fall again, we must rise and resolve again.

Fourthly, when we see others fall, we are not to be astonished: but rather let us compassionate them, thanking God the same has not happened to ourselves, and praying Him to keep His hand over us; otherwise the Lord will punish us by permitting us to fall into the same sins, and perhaps worse.

Fifthly, we must always consider ourselves the greatest sinners in the world; even when we know that others have sinned more than we; because *our* sins having been committed after we had received so many lights and graces, will be more displeasing to God than the faults of others, though perhaps more numerous than ours. St. Teresa says that we must not think we have made any progress in the Way of Perfection until we esteem ourselves worse than every one else, and desire to be considered the last of all.

Humility of the *will* or *heart* consists in being pleased when we are despised by others. Any one who has deserved hell, deserves to be trodden under foot by devils forever. Jesus Christ desires that we should learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart* (Matt. xi. 29). Many are humble in word, but not in heart. They say: "I am worse than all: I deserve a thousand hells." But when anyone reproves them, or says a word that displeases them, they immediately take umbrage. They are like the hedgehogs, which put out their bristles as soon as they are touched. But how is this -- you say you are worse than all, and yet you cannot bear a word? "He who is truly humble," says St. Bernard, "esteems himself good for nothing, and desires to be so regarded by others as well."

In the first place, then, if you wish to be truly humble, when you receive an admonition, receive it in good part, and thank the person who admonishes you. St. Chrysostom says: "When the

just man is corrected, he is sorry for the error he has committed; but the proud man is sorry that the error should be known." The Saints, when they are accused, even wrongfully, do not justify themselves, except when it is necessary to defend themselves in order to avoid giving scandal: otherwise they are silent, and offer all to God.

In the second place, when you receive an affront, suffer it patiently, and increase in love towards the person who has ill-treated you. This is the touchstone that tests whether a person is humble and holy. If he resents an injury, even though he may work miracles, you may say that he is an empty reed. Father Balthazar Alvarez said that the time of humiliation is the time to gain treasures of merits. You will gain more by peaceably suffering some contempt, than you could by fasting ten days on bread and water. Humiliations we inflict on ourselves are good; but those we accept from the hands of others are worth much more, because in these there is less of self and more of God; therefore, when we know how to bear them the merit is greater. But what can a Christian pretend to do if he cannot bear to be despised for the sake of God? How much contempt did not Jesus Christ suffer for us! Buffetings, derision, scourging, and spitting in His face! Ah! if we loved Jesus Christ, not only should we not show resentment for injuries, but rather rejoice at seeing ourselves despised as Jesus Christ was despised.

Evening Meditation

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE FLESH.

I.

St. Bernardine says that the most celebrated of all counsels, and the one which is, as it were, the very foundation of Religion, is to flee the occasions of sin. Being compelled by Exorcisms, the devil once confessed that of all sermons, that which displeased him most was the sermon *on avoiding the occasions of sin*: and justly so, for the devil laughs at all the resolutions and promises of penitent sinners who remain in the occasion of sin. The occasion of sins of the flesh, in particular, is like a veil placed before the eyes which prevents the soul from seeing either its resolutions, or the lights received from God, or the truths of eternity. In a word, it makes it forget everything, and almost blinds it. The neglect of

avoiding the occasions of sin was the cause of the fall of our first parents. God had forbidden them even to touch the forbidden fruit. *God commanded us*, said Eve, *that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it* (Gen. iii. 3). But through want of caution she *saw, took, and ate it*. She first began to look at the apple, she afterwards took it in her hand, and then ate it. He who voluntarily exposes himself to danger, will perish in it. *He that loveth danger shall perish in it* (Ecclus. iii. 27). St. Peter tells us that the devil *goeth about seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter v. 8). And what, says St. Cyprian, does he do in order to enter again into the soul from which he has been expelled? He seeks an occasion of sin. If the soul permits him to bring it again into the occasion of sin, he will enter again and devour it. The Abbot Gueric says that Lazarus came forth from the grave bound hand and foot, and after rising in this state he died again. He means to say, that miserable is the man who rises from sin bound by the occasion of sin. Though he should rise, he will surely fall again. He, then, who wishes to be saved must forsake not only all *sin*, but the *occasions of sin* -- that is, the companions, the house, the connections which lead to sin.

But you will say: I have changed my life, and now I have no bad motive, nor even a temptation in the society of such a person. It is related that in Mauritania there are bears that go in search of monkeys. As soon as they see a bear, the monkeys save themselves by climbing the trees: but what does the bear do? He stretches himself, as if dead, under the tree; and when the monkeys descend, he springs up, seizes, and devours them. It is thus the devil acts: he makes the temptations appear as dead; and when the soul exposes itself to the occasions of sin, he excites the temptation which devours it. Oh! how many miserable souls, that practised Mental Prayer and frequent Communion, and might be called Saints, have, by putting themselves into dangerous occasions, become the prey of hell! It is related in Ecclesiastical history, that a holy matron, who devoted herself to the pious work of burying the Martyrs, found one of them alive. She brought him to her house: he recovered. What happened? By the proximate occasion, these two Saints, as they might be called, first lost the grace of God, and afterwards lost the Faith.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for the light which Thou now givest me, and for the means of salvation Thou makest known to me. I promise to endeavour to persevere in the practice of them. I see that Thou wishest my salvation; and I wish to be saved principally to please Thy Heart, which so ardently desires my salvation. O my God, I will no longer resist the love Thou entertainest for me. This love has made Thee bear with me so patiently when I offended Thee. Thou callest me to Thy love, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness: I love Thee, O infinite Good.

II.

The Lord commanded Isaias to proclaim that *all flesh is grass* (Is. xl. 6). Is it possible, asks St. John Chrysostom, for hay not to burn when it is thrown into the fire? And St. Cyprian says that it is impossible to stand in the midst of the flames and not be burned. According to the Prophet Isaias, our strength is like that of tow cast into the fire. *And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow* (Is. i. 31). And Solomon says: *Can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?* (Prov. vi. 27). Thus it is likewise folly to expose ourselves to the occasion of sin, and to expect not to fall. It is necessary then to fly from sin as from the face of a serpent. *Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent* (Ecclus. xxi. 2). We ought not only to avoid the bite or contact of a serpent, but should also keep from approaching it. But you will say: My interest requires that I should frequent such a house, or that I should keep up a certain friendship. But if you see that such a house is for you a way to hell, there is no remedy; you must forsake it if you wish to save your soul. *Her house is the way to hell* (Prov. vii. 27). The Lord tells you that if your right eye is a cause of damnation to you, you must *pluck it out and cast it from you* (Matt. v. 29). Mark the words: you must *cast it*, not *beside* you, but *from* you -- that is, you must take away every occasion of sin. St. Francis of Assisi says, that the devil tempts spiritual souls who have given themselves to God, in a way different from that in which he tempts the wicked. In the beginning he does not seek to bind them with a chain; he is content to hold them by a single hair: he then binds them with a slender thread; afterwards with a cord; then with a chain; and thus drags them to sin. And therefore he who wishes to be free

from the danger of perdition must from the beginning break all these hairs; he must avoid all occasions of sins; he must give up these salutations, presents, letters, and the like. And for those who have contracted a habit of committing sins against purity, it will not be enough to avoid *proximate occasions*: unless they fly even from *remote occasions*, they will relapse.

He who sincerely wishes to be saved, must often repeat with the Saints: *Let all be lost, provided God is not lost*, so as continually to strengthen and renew his resolution of never again renouncing the friendship of God.

Ah! I entreat Thee, O my God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, not to permit me to be ever again ungrateful to Thee, and, either to make me cease to be ungrateful to Thee, or to make me cease to live. Lord, Thou hast already begun the work; bring it to perfection. *Confirm, O God, what thou hast wrought in us* (Ps. lxxvii. 29). Give me light, give me strength, give me love. O Mary, thou who art the treasurer of graces, assist me: accept me for thy servant and pray to Jesus for me. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, first, and then through thy prayers, I hope for salvation.

Thursday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

(For the Twenty-Fifth of February)

"A WORM AND NO MAN"

Did not our Holy Faith assure us of it, who could ever believe that a God, for the love of such a worm as man is, should Himself become a worm like man? *I am a worm and no man* (Ps. xxi. 7). And what return have you hitherto made to God for the love your God has borne you?

I.

Yes, this is of Faith: *And the word was made flesh*. (Jo. i. 14). *He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood* (Apoc. i. 5). The Holy Church declares herself to be filled with fear at the contemplation of the work of Redemption: *I considered thy works, and was afraid*. And this the Prophet had said of old: *O Lord, I have heard thy hearing, and was afraid . . . Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people; for salvation with thy Christ* (Hab. iii. 2, 13).

Hence St. Thomas terms the Mystery of the Incarnation the miracle of miracles; a miracle above all comprehension in which God showed how mighty was His love towards men by which God became Man, the Creator a creature, the Lord a servant, the impassible One subject to sufferings and to death: *He hath showed might in his arm* (Luke i. 51). We are told that St. Peter of Alcantara hearing those words of the Gospel sung on Christmas night -- *In the beginning was the Word* -- and reflecting on this Mystery, became so inflamed with Divine love that, in a state of ecstasy, he was borne a considerable space through the air to the foot of the Blessed Sacrament. And St. Augustine says that his soul could feast forever on the contemplation of the exalted goodness of God manifested to us in the work of human Redemption. It was for this reason and on account of his fervent devotion to this Mystery, God sent this Saint to inscribe on the heart of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi the words: *And the Word was made flesh*

So great, then, my Jesus, was the desire Thou hadst to be loved by us that all through Thy life Thou didst only desire to suffer and die for us, and thus put us under the necessity of loving Thee at least out of gratitude for so much love. And dost Thou so thirst for our love? How is it, then, we so little desire Thine? Alas, hitherto I have been foolish, for I have not only not desired Thy love but I have brought Thy hatred upon me. My Redeemer, I know the evil I have done. I detest it and am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Help me, Jesus, my Love!

II.

Whosoever loves, has no other end in loving but to be loved in return. God, then, having so dearly loved us, seeks nothing from us, as St. Bernard remarks, but our love. Wherefore, he goes on to say: "He has made known His love that He may experience thine." O man, whoever thou art, thou hast witnessed the love which God has borne thee in becoming Man, in suffering and dying for thee; how long shall it be before God will know by experience, and by thy deeds the love thou bearest Him? Ah! truly every man at the sight of a God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such hardship, and suffer a death of such ignominy, ought to be enkindled with love towards so loving a

God. *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down: the mountains would melt away at thy presence, ... the waters would burn with fire* (Is. lxiv. 1-2). Oh that Thou wouldst deign, my God, to leave the Heavens, and descend here and become Man amongst us! Ah, *the mountains would melt away!* On beholding Thee as one of themselves, men would surmount all obstacles, all difficulties in observing Thy laws and counsels would melt away! *The waters would burn with fire!* Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls would catch the flame of Thy blessed love! And, in fact, since the Incarnation of the Son of God, O how brilliantly has the fire of Divine love shone in many loving souls! And it may be indeed asserted, without fear of contradiction, God has been more loved in one Century since the coming of Jesus Christ than in the entire forty preceding Centuries. How many youths, how many of the nobly born, and how many monarchs, have left wealth, honours, and their very kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that there, hidden in poverty and seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves to the love of their Saviour! How many Martyrs have gone to torments and to death rejoicing and making merry! How many tender young virgins have refused the proffered hand of the great ones of this world, in order to go and die for Jesus Christ, and so repay in some measure the affection of a God Who stooped down to become incarnate and to die for love of them!

Have all men sought thus to correspond with this immense love of Jesus Christ? Alas, my God, the greater number have repaid Thee with nothing but ingratitude! And you also, tell me, what return have you hitherto made for the love your God has borne you? Have you always shown yourself thankful? Have you ever seriously reflected what those words mean: A God made Man! A God to die for thee!

O my Jesus, forget the offences that I have committed against Thee. Thou art my Love, Thou art my Hope! Thou knowest how weak I am. Help me, my Jesus. O Mary, great Mother of God, succour me also with thy prayers.

piritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

II. -- THE PRACTICE OF MORTIFICATION

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me (St. Matt. xvi. 24).

This is all that anyone who wishes to be a follower of Jesus Christ has to do. The denying of oneself is the mortification of self-love. Do we wish to be saved? We must, then, conquer all to make sure of all. How miserable is the soul that allows itself to be guided by self-love!

Mortification is of two kinds, interior and exterior. By *interior mortification* we have to study to conquer our passions, and especially our most predominant one. A person who does not overcome his predominant passion is in great danger of being lost. Whereas he who has overcome that, will easily conquer all the others. Some, however, allow one vice to predominate in them, and think that they are good because they do not see in themselves vices which others have. "But what does it matter?" says St. Cyril: "one leak is enough to sink the ship." Nor will it suffice to say: "I cannot abstain from this vice," -- a resolute will conquers all, that is, of course, with the assistance of God Who will never fail us.

Exterior mortification has to do with conquering the sensual appetites. Worldly people call the Saints cruel when they deny their bodies all satisfaction of the senses and chastise them with hair-shirts, disciplines, and other penances. "But," says St. Bernard, "they are in reality much more cruel who condemn themselves to burn for ever in hell-fire for the sake of the short and miserable pleasures of this life." Others say that all forbidden pleasures should be denied to the body; but they despise external mortifications, saying, that interior mortification is what is required; that is, the mortification of the will. Yes, it is principally necessary to mortify the will, but the mortification of the flesh is also necessary; because when the flesh is not mortified, obedience to God's laws is difficult. St. John of the Cross said that any one who taught that external mortification was not necessary, ought not to be believed, even though he worked miracles. But let us come to the practice of it.

In the first place, *the eyes must be mortified*. The first arrows

which wound the soul, and often kill it, enter through the eyes. The eyes are, as it were, grappling-irons of hell, which drag souls, as if by main force, into sin. A certain Pagan philosopher voluntarily put out his eyes to free himself from impurity. It is not lawful for us to pluck out our eyes, but we ought to render them blind by means of mortification; otherwise we shall find it difficult to keep ourselves chaste. St. Francis de Sales said: "You must close the gates if you do not wish the enemy to enter into the citadel." We must abstain from looking at any object that may give occasion to temptation. St. Aloysius Gonzaga did not dare to raise his eyes to look even at his own mother. And when by chance our eyes light on some dangerous object, let us take care not to fix them on it. "It is not so much the mere seeing," says St. Francis de Sales, "but the inspecting and continuing to look, that is the cause of ruin." Let us then be very careful in mortifying our eyes; because many are now in hell on account of sins committed with the eyes.

In the second place, *we must mortify our tongue*, by abstaining from words of detraction, of abuse, or of obscenity. An impure word spoken in conversation, even in jest, may prove a scandal to others, and be the cause and source of a thousand sins. And it should be observed, that often a word of double meaning, said in a witty way, does more harm than a word openly impure.

In the third place, *we must mortify the taste*. St. Andrew Avellino said that in order to commence a good Christian life, a man must begin by the mortification of his palate. And St. Francis de Sales said: "We must eat to live, not live to eat." Many seem to live only to eat, and thus they destroy the health both of their soul and body. For the most part costiveness, diarrhoea, and other illnesses are caused by gluttony. But the worst is, that intemperance in eating and drinking is often the cause of incontinence. Cassian writes that it is impossible for a man who is satiated with food and heating drinks -- as wine, brandy, and the like, not to feel many impure temptations. "But how is this?" says some one; "must I eat no more?" Yes, my good friend, we must eat to preserve our life, but like rational beings, not as brutes. Especially if you desire to be free from impure temptations, abstain from eating overmuch meat, and from overmuch wine.

The Scripture says: *Give not wine to kings* (Prov. xxxi. 4). By a king is meant one who brings his flesh under the dominion of reason. Much wine makes us lose our reason, and involves not only the vice of intemperance which is certainly a mortal sin, but also that of impurity. Do not complain of sometimes having to fast or abstain, especially on a Saturday, in honour of the Most Holy Mary. Many fast on bread and water. This you can at least do on the Vigils of the seven principal Feasts of Our Lady. I pray you to observe at least the Fasts of obligation. Some go beyond fifteen or twenty ounces at collation, and say: It is alright if one is not satisfied." No, it is not alright. The most that can be taken on the evenings of fast days of obligation is eight ounces; and even that has grown up by custom; for in olden times food could be taken only once a day.

In the fourth place, *we must mortify our hearing and our touch*: the hearing, by avoiding listening to immodest and scandalous conversations; the touch, by using all possible caution, as well in regard to others as in regard to ourselves. Some say it is nothing, that they only do it in jest; but who, I ask, would play with fire?

Evening Meditation

THE GREAT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST FOR US

I.

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke iii. 6).

The Saviour of the world Whom the Prophet Isaias says men were one day to see on this earth -- *and all flesh shall see the salvation of God* -- has already come. We have not only seen Him conversing among men, but we have also seen Him suffering and dying for the love of us. Let us consider this great love which Jesus Christ has shown us.

"Christ," says St. Augustine, "came on earth that men might know how much God loves them." He has come, and to show the immense love which this God bears us, He has given Himself entirely to us, by abandoning Himself to all the pains of this life, and afterwards to the scourges, the thorns, and all the sorrows and insults of His Passion, and offering Himself to die abandoned by all, on the infamous tree of the Cross. *Who hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2).

Jesus Christ could save us without dying on the Cross, and

without suffering. One drop of His Blood would be sufficient for our redemption. Even a prayer offered to His Eternal Father would be sufficient; because, on account of His Divinity, His prayer would be of infinite value, and would therefore be sufficient for the salvation of the world and of a thousand worlds. "But," says an ancient author, "what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for love." To show how much He loved us, He wished to shed not only a part of His Blood, but the whole of it, by dint of torments. This may be inferred from the words which He used on the night before His death: *This is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many* (Matt. xxvi. 28). The words *shall be shed* show that, in His Passion, the Blood of Jesus Christ was poured forth even to the last drop. Hence, when after death His side was opened with a spear, Blood and water came forth. What then flowed out was all that remained of His Blood. Jesus Christ, then, though He could save us without suffering, wished to embrace a life of continual pain, and to suffer the cruel and ignominious death of the Cross. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8).

O Jesus, let Thy Blood flow upon me as upon the good Thief to wash me from my sins. May it inflame me with Thy holy love and make me all Thine own! I love Thee, O my Jesus, and I wish that I could die crucified for Thee as Thou didst die crucified for me.

II.

Greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jo. xv. 13). To show His love for us, what more could the Son of God do than die for us? What more can one man do for another than give his life for him? *Greater love than this no man hath*. Tell me, if one of your servants, if the vilest man on this earth, had done for you what Jesus Christ has done in dying of pain on a Cross, could you remember his love for you and not love him?

St. Francis of Assisi appeared to be unable to think of anything save the Passion of Jesus Christ; and thinking on it, he continually shed tears, so that by his constant weeping he became nearly blind. Being found one day weeping and groaning at the foot of the Crucifix, he was asked the cause of his tears and lam-

entations. He replied: "I weep over the sorrows and ignominies of my Lord. And what makes me weep still more is, that the men for whom He has suffered so much live in forgetfulness of Him."

O Christian, should a doubt ever enter your mind that Jesus Christ loves you, raise your eyes and look at Him hanging on the Cross. Ah! the Cross to which He is nailed, the internal and external sorrows which He endures, and the cruel death which He suffers for you, are, says St. Thomas of Villanova, convincing proofs of the love which He bears you. Do you not, says St. Bernard, hear that Cross and those Wounds crying out to make you feel that He truly loves you?

Ah, my Jesus, yes, Thou hast loved me even unto dying for me and I, too, wish to love Thee even unto dying for Thee! O my Lord, revenge Thyself upon me for my offences, but let it be the revenge of pity and of love!

Friday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

"O LOVE, O LOVE, O LOVE!"

St. Paul says that when the Gentiles heard it preached that Jesus was crucified for the love of men they considered it such foolishness that they could not believe it. Yes, for it seemed only folly that a God should die for men. Hence the Saints were struck dumb with amazement at the consideration of the love of Jesus Christ. At the sight of the crucifix St. Francis de Paul could only exclaim: O Love! O Love! O Love!

I.

St. Paul says that the love Jesus has shown us in condescending to suffer so much for our salvation should excite us more powerfully to love Him than the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the painful journey to Calvary, the agony of three hours on the Cross, the buffets, the spitting in His face, and all the other injuries which the Saviour endured. According to the Apostle, the love which Jesus has shown us not only obliges, but in a certain manner forces and constrains us, to love a God Who has loved us so much. *For the charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14). On this text St. Francis de Sales writes: "We know that Jesus, the true God, has loved us so as to suffer death, and even the death

of the Cross for our salvation. Does not such love put our hearts as it were under a press, to force from them love by a violence which is all the stronger in proportion as it is more amiable?"

So great was the love which inflamed the enamoured Heart of Jesus, that He not only wished to die for our redemption, but during His whole life He sighed ardently for the day on which He should suffer death for the love of us. Hence, during His life Jesus used to say: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?* (Luke xii. 50). In My Passion I am to be baptized with the baptism of My own Blood to wash away the sins of men. *And how am I straitened!* How, says St. Ambrose, explaining this passage, am I straitened by the desire of the speedy arrival of the day of my death? Hence, on the night before His Passion, He said: *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer* (Luke xxii. 15).

O infinite Love, worthy of infinite love, when shall I love Thee, my Jesus, as Thou hast loved me! Enlighten me, inflame me, detach me from the earth, and permit me no longer to resist so many enticements of Thy love.

II.

We have, says St. Laurence Justinian, seen wisdom become foolish through excess of love. We have seen the Son of God become as it were a fool, through the excessive love He bore to men. Such, too, was the language of the Gentiles when they heard the Apostles preaching that Jesus Christ suffered death for the love of men. *But we*, says St. Paul, *preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock, unto the Gentiles foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23). Who, they exclaimed, can believe that a God, most happy in Himself, and Who stands in need of no one, should take human flesh and die for the love of men who are His creatures? This would be to believe that a God became foolish for the love of men. "It appears folly," says St. Gregory, "that the Author of Life should die for men." But whatever infidels may say or think, it is of Faith that the Son of God has shed all His Blood for the love of us, to wash away the sins of our souls. *Who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood* (Apoc. i. 5). Hence the Saints were struck dumb with astonishment at the consideration of the love of Jesus Christ. At the sight of the Crucifix, St. Fran-

cis de Paul could only exclaim: O love! O love! O love!

O my Jesus, if Thou art, as it were, mad for the love of me, how is it that I do not become mad for the love of a God! When I see Thee crucified and dead for me, how is it that I can think of any other than Thee! Mary, my Mother, entreat Jesus for me that He may grant me His holy love.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

III. -- CHARITY TOWARDS THE NEIGHBOUR

He who loves God loves his neighbour also: but he who loves not his neighbour loves not God, for the Divine Precept is: *that he who loveth God love also his brother* (1 Jo. iv. 21). We must also love our neighbour in heart as well as in deed. And how much are we to love him? Here is the rule: *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul ... and thy neighbour as thyself* (Luke x. 27). We must, then, love God above all things, and more than ourselves; and our neighbour as ourselves. So that, as we desire our own good, and rejoice in it, and, on the contrary, are sorry for any evil that may happen to us; so also we must desire our neighbour's good, and rejoice when he obtains it; and, on the other hand, we must be sorry for his misfortune. So, again, without good grounds we must neither judge nor suspect evil of our neighbour. And this is what constitutes *interior charity*.

External charity regards our words and actions towards the neighbour. As to words, -- first, we must abstain from the least shadow of detraction. A detractor is hateful to God and man. But he who speaks well of every one is beloved by God and men; and when the fault cannot be excused, we must at least excuse the intention. Secondly, let us be careful not to repeat to any one the evil that has been said of him by another; because sometimes long enmities and revenge arise from such things. The Scripture says that he who sows discord is hated by God. Thirdly, we must take care not to wound our neighbour, by saying, even in jest, any thing that may hurt him. Would *you* like to be laughed at in the same way as you laugh at your neighbour? Fourthly, let us avoid disputes. Sometimes on account of a mere trifle quarrels are begun, which end in abuse and rancour. We have also to guard against the spirit of contradiction which some indulge

by gratuitously setting themselves to contradict everything. On such occasions give your opinion and then be quiet. Fifthly, let us speak gently to all, even to our inferiors; therefore let us not make use of imprecations or abuse. And when our neighbour is angry with us, and somewhat abusive, let us answer meekly and the quarrel will be at an end: *A mild answer breaketh wrath* (Prov. xv. 1). And when annoyed by our neighbour, we must be careful not to speak because our passion will then make us go too far: it will make us exaggerate, and afterwards we shall certainly be sorry for it. St. Francis of Sales said: "I was never angry in my life that I did not repent of it shortly afterwards." The rule is to be silent as long as we feel ourselves disturbed. And when our neighbour continues to be irritated, let us reserve the correction till another time, even though it should be necessary; because at the moment our words would not convince or do any good.

With regard also to charity in our actions towards our neighbour. First, it is practised by aiding him as best we may. Let us remember what the Scripture says: *For alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness* (Job iv. 11). Alms-giving, then, saves us from sin and from hell. By alms is understood any assistance it is in our power to render our neighbour. The kind of almsgiving which is the most meritorious is, to help the soul of our neighbour, by correcting him gently and opportunely whenever we can. And let us not say with some: "What does it matter to me?" It does matter to one who is a Christian. He who loves God wishes to see Him loved by all.

Secondly, we must show charity towards the sick who are in greater need of help than others. If they are poor, let us take them some little present. At least let us go and wait on them and comfort them, even though they should not thank us for it. The Lord will reward us for it.

Thirdly, we must above all show charity to our enemies. Some are all kindness with their friends; but Jesus Christ says: *Do good to those that hate you* (Matt. v. 44). By this you may know that a man is a true Christian, if he seeks to do good to those who wish him evil. And if we can do nothing else for those who persecute us, let us at least pray that God will prosper them, according as Jesus commands us: *Pray for them that persecute you*

(Matt. v. 44). This is the way the Saints revenged themselves. He who pardons anyone who has offended him, is sure of being pardoned by God, since God has given us the promise: *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven* (Luke vi. 37). Our Lord said one day to the Blessed Angela of Foligno, that the surest sign of your being loved by God, is when you love the person who has offended you.

Fourthly, let us also be charitable to our neighbours who are dead, that is, to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. St. Thomas says, that if we are bound to help our neighbours who are alive, we are also bound to remember them when dead. Those holy prisoners are suffering pains which exceed all the suffering of this life, and, nevertheless, are in the greatest necessity, since they cannot possibly help themselves. A Cistercian monk once said to the sacristan of his monastery: "Help me, brother, by your prayers, when I can no longer help myself." Let us, then, endeavour to succour these Holy Souls either by having Masses said for them, or by hearing Masses for them, by giving alms, or at least by praying and applying indulgences on their behalf. They will show themselves grateful by obtaining great graces for us, not only when they reach Heaven, if they get there sooner through our prayers, but also while still in Purgatory.

Evening Meditation

OUR OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE JESUS CHRIST

I.

He who loves, wishes to be loved. "When," says St. Bernard, "God loves, He desires nothing else than to be loved." The Redeemer said: *I am come to cast fire on the earth and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Luke xii. 49). God wishes nothing else from us than to be loved. Hence the holy Church prays in the following words: "We beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thy spirit may inflame us with that fire Jesus Christ cast upon the earth, and which He ardently wished to be kindled."

Ah, what have not the Saints, inflamed with this fire, accomplished! They have abandoned all things -- delights, honours, the purple and the sceptre -- that They might burn with this holy fire. But you will ask what are you to do, that you too may be inflamed with the love of Jesus Christ. Imitate David: *In my*

meditation a fire shall flame out (Ps. xxxviii. 4). Meditation is the blessed furnace in which the holy fire of Divine love is kindled. Make Mental Prayer every day; meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ, and doubt not but you too shall burn with this blessed flame.

St. Paul says, that Jesus Christ died for us to make Himself the Master of the hearts of all. *To this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be lord both of the dead and of the living* (Rom. xiv. 9). He wished, says the Apostle, to give His life for all men, that not even one should live any longer to himself, but that all might live only to that God Who condescended to die for them. *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).

Ah! to correspond to the love of this God, it would be necessary that another God should die for Him, as Jesus Christ died for us. O ingratitude of men! A God has condescended to give His life for their salvation, and they will not even think of what He has done for them! If each of you thought frequently on the sufferings of the Redeemer, and on the love which He has shown to us in His Passion, how could you but love Him with your whole hearts? To him who with a lively Faith sees the Son of God suspended by three nails on an infamous gibbet, every wound of Jesus speaks and says: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*. Love, O man, thy Lord and thy God Who has loved thee so intensely. Who can resist such tender invitations? "The Wounds of Jesus Christ," says St. Bonaventure, "wound the hardest hearts, and inflame frozen souls."

II.

Oh, si scires mysterium crucis! Oh, if thou didst know the mystery of the Cross! said St. Andrew the Apostle to the tyrant by whom he was tempted to deny Jesus Christ. O tyrant, if you knew the love which your Saviour has shown you by dying on the Cross for your salvation, instead of tempting me, you would abandon all the goods of this earth to give yourself to the love of Jesus Christ.

Henceforth meditate every day on the Passion of Jesus Christ, for at least a quarter of an hour. Let each one procure a Crucifix, and keep it in his room, and from time to time glance at it, saying: "Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast died for me, and yet I do

not love Thee!"

Had a person suffered for a friend injuries, buffets, and prisons, he would be greatly pleased to find that the friend remembered and spoke of him with gratitude. But he would be greatly displeased if the friend for whom these trials had been borne, were unwilling to think or hear of his sufferings. Thus frequent Meditation on His Passion is very pleasing to our Redeemer; but the neglect of it greatly provokes His displeasure.

Oh, how great will be the consolation we shall receive in our last moments from the sorrows and death of Jesus Christ, if, during life, we shall have frequently meditated on them with love! Let us not wait till others, at the hour of death, place in our hands the Crucifix; let us not wait till they remind us of all that Jesus Christ suffered for us. Let us during life embrace Jesus Christ crucified and keep ourselves always united to Him, that we may live and die with Him. He who practises devotion to the Passion of our Lord, cannot but be devoted to the sorrows of Mary, the remembrance of which will be to us a source of great consolation at the hour of death.

Oh, how profitable and sweet to meditate on Jesus on the Cross! How happy the death of him who dies in the embraces of Jesus crucified, accepting death with cheerfulness for the love of that God Who has died for love of us!

Saturday--Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation

CONFIDENCE IN MARY'S INTERCESSION

HER DESIRE TO HELP US

St. Bernard says that since the power to save us cannot be wanting to Mary as she is the Mother of God, so neither can the desire to help us be wanting because she is our Mother. O Mother of God, and my Mother, Mary, in thee do I place all my confidence.

I.

Of what use, says St. Bonaventure, would Mary's power be to us if she did not care to help us? But, adds the Saint, let us hold for certain that as the Virgin Mary is the most powerful of all the Saints before God, so she is the most solicitous of all for

our salvation. "And who, O Lady," says St. Germanus, "after thy Son, feels greater solicitude for us than thou dost? Who defends us so powerfully in our afflictions? Who labours so hard for the conversion of sinners? O Mary, thy protection is so great that we cannot comprehend it." St. Andrew Avellino used to call Mary "the agent of Paradise." For what does she do in Heaven? She prays continually for us and obtains for us all the graces that we ask. She said one day to St. Bridget: "I am called, and I truly am, the Mother of Mercy; for such the Mercy of God has made me." And who but God in His Mercy, because He wishes to save all, has given us this great protectress? Miserable, and miserable for eternity, said the Blessed Virgin to St. Bridget, shall be the man who is damned, because when it was in his power in this life to invoke my intercession, he neglected to have recourse to me who am so compassionate to all.

Richard of St. Victor says that Mary is so full of mercy that when she sees our miseries she instantly assists us; she cannot behold a soul in want without coming to its relief.

It was thus she acted when she lived on earth as we learn from what happened at the Marriage in Cana of Galilee. If, then, says St. Bonaventure, Mary's compassion for the afflicted was so great while she lived in this world, her pity for us is certainly far greater now that she reigns in Heaven where she has a better knowledge of our miseries and greater compassion for our afflictions.

O Lady, if thou pray for me I shall be saved, for thou dost obtain by thy prayers whatever thou wishest. Pray, then, for me, O great Mother of God, for thy Son hears thee and grants whatever thou askest. It is true that I am unworthy of thy protection, but thou hast never abandoned a soul that had recourse to thee. O Mary, I consign my soul to thee. Thou hast to save it.

II.

Let us not neglect to have recourse in all our necessities to the Divine Mother who is ever prepared to succour all who invoke her intercession. We shall always find her hands full of mercies and graces. Richard of St. Victor says that Mary's heart is so full of compassion, that as soon as she perceives the wants of the miserable, she anticipates their supplications, and obtains

relief for them before they ask it. Why, then, says St. Bernard, should we fear that when we have recourse to Mary she will not console us? She is not austere; she does not inspire terror; she is all sweetness and benignity to those who recommend themselves to her. And can she be otherwise than beneficent to those who ask her prayers, when she herself goes in search of the miserable to save them? Behold how she invites all, and encourages them to hope for all good if they have recourse to her: *In me is all hope of life and of virtue: come over to me all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits* (Ecclus. xxiv. 25). On this passage Pelbart says: "She calls all, the just and sinners." The devil, according to St. Peter, *goes about seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter v. 8), but this Divine Mother, says Bernardine da Bustis, goes about seeking whom she may save.

To obtain salvation through her intercession it is enough to ask the aid of her prayers. St. Bonaventure has written that Mary's desire for our welfare and salvation is so great, that she is offended not only with those who do her a positive injury, but also with those who do not ask favours from her. Hence the Saint used to say that when he looked at Mary he beheld Mercy itself stretching out her hands to raise him up from his miseries. For this great Lady knows not, and has never known, how to behold without compassion, or to leave without succour, a person who in his misery recommends himself to her. Mary's constant occupation in Heaven consists in asking mercy for the miserable. St. Bridget once heard Jesus say to His holy Mother: "My Mother, ask what you wish from Me." And what was Mary's request? "I ask Mercy for the miserable." As if she said: My Son, since Thou hast made me Mother of Mercy and Advocate of the miserable, what else will I ask from Thee but Mercy for those who are in misery? And because poor sinners are the most miserable of all, she has her eyes always turned to them in order to assist them.

O Mary, my Mother, I cannot fear, seeing thy immense mercy and the very great desire of thy most sweet heart to help the most abandoned sinners. And who was ever lost who had recourse to thee? Therefore, I invoke thy aid, O my great advocate, my refuge, my hope, my Mother Mary! Into thy hands I entrust

the cause of my eternal salvation. To thee I commit my soul. I implore thee, O Mary, for the love that thou bearest to Jesus, to preserve and increase in me more and more this sweet confidence in thy intercession. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

IV. -- DEVOTION TOWARDS THE GREAT MOTHER OF GOD

As regards this devotion, I hope the reader is fully persuaded that in order to insure eternal salvation, it is most important to be devout to the great Mother of God. And if he should wish to be still more convinced of it, I would beg him to read the book I have written, *The Glories of Mary*. I shall here speak only of the practices to be observed, that you may obtain the protection of this sovereign Lady. First, every morning and evening, when you get up and before you go to bed, say three *Hail Marys*, adding this short prayer: *By thy pure and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, make my body pure and my soul holy!* And put yourself beneath her mantle that she may keep you that day or that night from sin. And every time you hear the clock strike, say a *Hail Mary*. Do the same whenever you go in or out of the house, and when you pass by any statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin. So also when you begin and finish any of your occupations, such as study, work, eating, or sleeping, never omit to say a *Hail Mary*.

Secondly, say the *Rosary* every day, at least five decades, meditating on the Mysteries. Many devout people also say the Office of Our Lady. It would be well to say at any rate the Little Office of the Name of Mary, which is very short, and composed of five short psalms.

Thirdly, say an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* every day to the ever-blessed Trinity in thanksgiving for the graces that have been bestowed upon Mary. The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to a person that this devotion was very pleasing to her.

Fourthly, fast on bread and water every Saturday in honour of Mary, or at least on the Vigils of her seven Feasts. At any rate fast in the ordinary way, or eat only of one dish, or abstain from something you like. In short, make use of some kind of mortification on Saturdays, and on the above-named Vigils, for the sake

of this Queen, who (as St. Andrew of Crete says) repays these little things with great graces.

Fifthly, pay a *Visit* every day to some image of your Patroness, and ask her to give you holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

Sixthly, let no day pass without reading a little about Our Lady.

Seventhly, make the *Novenas* for the seven principal Feasts of Mary, and ask your confessor to tell you what devotions and mortifications you should practise during those nine days. Say at least nine *Hail Marys* and *Glory be to the Father*, and beg her each day of the Novena to give you some special grace of which you are in need.

Lastly, often recommend yourself to this Divine Mother during the day, and particularly in time of temptation, saying at such times, and often repeating with great affection: O Mary help me! Help me, O my Mother!

And if you love Mary, try to promote devotion to this great Mother of God among your relations, friends and servants.

Evening Meditation

PRAYER

I. -- ITS POWER

I.

Ask and it shall be given you ... for every one that asketh receiveth (Luke xi. 9, 10).

In a thousand places in the Old and the New Testament, God promises to hear all who pray to Him. *Cry to me and I will hear thee* (Jer. xxxiii. 3). *Call upon me ... and I will deliver thee* (Ps. xlix. 15). *If you ask anything in my name, that I will do* (Jo. xiv. 14). *You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you* (Jo. xv. 7). Hence Theodoret has said that prayer is one, but can obtain all things. St. Bernard says that when we pray, the Lord will give either the grace we ask, or one that is more useful to us. The Prophet animates us to pray by assuring us that God is all mercy to those who invoke His aid. *Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee* (Ps. lxxxv. 5). The words of St. James are still more encouraging. *If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth abundantly to all men*

and upbraideth not (James i. 5). This Apostle tells us that when we pray to the Lord, He opens His hands and gives us more than we ask. *He giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not.* He does not reproach us with the offences we have offered to Him; but, when we pray to Him, He appears to forget all the injuries we have done Him.

St. John Climacus used to say that prayer in a certain manner forces God to grant us whatsoever we ask of Him. "Prayer piously offers violence to God." But it is, as Tertullian says, a violence which is pleasing to Him, and which He desires from us. Yes; for as St. Augustine says, God has a greater desire to give us His graces, than we have to receive them. The reason is, because God is of His own nature infinite Goodness. Hence He feels an infinite desire to impart His benefits to us. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say that God feels as it were under an obligation to the soul that prays to Him; because by prayer it opens to Him the way by which He can satisfy His desire of dispensing His graces to us.

O Eternal God, I adore Thee and I thank Thee for all the benefits Thou hast bestowed upon me, -- for having created me, for having redeemed me, through Jesus Christ, for having made me a Christian, for having waited for me when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me. Ah, my God, I should never have offended Thee, if in my temptations I had recourse to Thee.

II.

David says that the goodness of God, in instantly hearing all who pray to Him, proves that God was his true God. *In what day so ever I shall call upon thee, behold, I know thou art my God* (Ps. lv. 10). Some, observes St. Bernard, complain that God fails them; but the Lord may far more justly complain that many fail Him when they neglect to ask His graces. Of this precisely the Redeemer appears to have complained one day to His disciples. *Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name: ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full* (Jo. xvi. 24). As if He said: Do not complain of Me if you do not enjoy complete happiness; complain of yourselves for not having asked My graces. Ask Me for them henceforth, and you shall be satisfied.

There is no exercise more conducive to salvation than to pray always and say: Lord, assist me! *Incline unto my aid, O God* (Ps. lxi. 2). The Venerable Paul Segneri used to say that in his Meditations he was at first accustomed to spend his time in *pious affections*; but, having afterwards learned the great efficacy of prayer, he endeavoured generally to employ himself in *petitions to God*. Let us always do the same. We have a God Who loves us to excess, and Who is solicitous for our salvation, and therefore He is ever ready to hear all who ask His graces. The earthly princes, says St. Chrysostom, give audience only to a few; but God gives audience to all who wish.

I thank Thee, O God, for the light by which Thou now makest me understand that my salvation consists in praying to Thee and in asking graces of Thee. Behold I entreat Thee in the Name of Jesus Christ, to give me a great sorrow for my sins, holy perseverance in Thy grace, a good death, Heaven, but above all, the great gift of Thy love and perfect resignation to Thy most holy will. I well know that I do not deserve these graces, but Thou has promised them to all who ask them of Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ. Through these merits I hope and ask for them. O Mary, thy prayers are always heard; pray for me.

Septuagesima Sunday

Morning Meditation

"HE SENT THEM INTO HIS VINEYARD." (Gospel of Sunday Matt. x. 1-16).

The Lord's vines are our souls which He has given us to cultivate by good works that one day we may be admitted into eternal glory. Many live as if they were never to die, or as if they had not to give to God an account of their lives, as if there were no Heaven and no hell. They believe but they do not reflect. They take all possible care of worldly affairs, but attend not to the salvation of their souls. O my God, what shall my lot be? If I may be lost why do I not embrace such a life as may secure for me eternal life?

I.

St. Paul says: *We entreat you, brethren ... that you do your own business* (1 Thess. iv. 10). The greater number of people in the

world are attentive to the business of this world. What diligence do they not employ to gain a law-suit or a good position! How many means are adopted -- how many measures taken! They neither eat nor sleep. And what efforts do they make to save their souls? All blush at being told that they neglect their family affairs, and how few are ashamed to neglect the salvation of their souls! *Brethren*, says St. Paul, *we entreat you that you do your own business*; that is, the business of your eternal salvation.

"The trifles of children," says St. Bernard, "are called trifles, but the *trifles* of men are called *business*," -- and for these trifles many lose their souls. If in one worldly transaction you suffer a loss, you may repair it in another; but if you die in enmity with God, and lose your soul, how can you repair the loss? *What exchange shall a man give for his soul?* (Matt. xvi. 26). To those who neglect the care of salvation, St. Eucherius says: "If thou dost not believe thy Creator how precious thou art, interrogate thy Redeemer." If, from being created by God to His own image, you do not comprehend the value of your soul, learn it from Jesus Christ Who has redeemed you with His own Blood. *You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled* (1 Pet. i. 18).

God, therefore, sets a high value on your soul. Such is its value in the estimation of Satan, that, to become master of it, he sleeps not night or day, but is continually going about seeking to make it his own. Hence St. Augustine exclaims: "The enemy sleeps not, and dost thou sleep?" The enemy is always awake to injure you, and you slumber. Pope Benedict XII being asked by a prince for a favour he could not conscientiously grant, said to the ambassador: Tell the prince that if I had two souls, I might be able to lose one of them to please him; but, since I have only one, I cannot consent to lose it. Thus he refused the favour the prince sought from him.

O God, what shall my lot be? Shall I be saved, or shall I be lost? I may be either saved or lost! And if I may be lost, why do I not embrace such a life as may secure for me life eternal? O Jesus, Thou didst die to save me; yet I have been lost as often as I have lost Thee, my sovereign Good! Suffer me not to lose Thee any more.

II.

Remember that, if you save your soul, your failure in every worldly transaction will be but of little consequence: for when you are saved, you shall enjoy complete happiness for all eternity. But if you lose your soul, what will it profit you to have enjoyed all the riches, honours and amusements of this world? For when you lose your soul, all is lost. *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul* (Matt. xvi. 26). By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God, and among them the soul of St. Francis Xavier who was then at Paris and devoted his attention to the acquirement of worldly goods. One day St. Ignatius said to him: "Francis, whom do you serve? You serve the world, a traitor that promises but does not perform. And if it should fulfil all its promises, how long do its goods last? Can they last longer than this life? And after death, what will they profit you if you shall not have saved your soul?" He then reminded Francis of the maxim of the Gospel: *What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?*

But one thing is necessary! (Luke x. 42). It is not necessary to become rich on this earth to acquire honours and dignities; but it is necessary to save our souls; because unless we gain Heaven we shall be condemned to hell: there is no middle place: we must be either saved or damned. God has not created us for this earth; neither does He preserve our lives here on earth that we may become rich and enjoy amusements. *And the end life everlasting* (Rom. vi. 22). He has created us, and preserved us, that we may acquire eternal glory.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, cast me not away from Thy face as I have deserved! I am indeed a sinner; but I grieve from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thy infinite goodness. Hitherto I have despised Thee, but now I love Thee above all things. Henceforth Thou alone shalt be my only Good, my only Love. Have pity on a sinner who penitently casts himself at Thy feet, and desires to love Thee. If I have grievously offended Thee, I now ardently desire to love Thee. What would have become of me, if Thou hadst called me out of life when I had lost Thy grace and favour? Since Thou, O Lord, hast shown so much mercy to

me, grant me grace to become a Saint.

Spiritual Reading

"*WHY STAND YE HERE ALL THE DAY IDLE?*" (Gospel of Sunday)

St. Philip Neri used to say that "Heaven is not for sluggards," and that he who does not seek the salvation of his soul above all things is a fool. If on this earth there were two classes of people, one *mortal*, and the other *immortal*, and if the former saw the latter entirely devoted to the acquisition of earthly goods, would they not exclaim: O fools that you are! You have it in your power to secure the immense and eternal goods of Paradise, and you lose your time in procuring the miserable goods of this earth, which shall end at death. And for these you expose yourselves to the danger of the eternal torments of hell! Leave to us mortals, for whom all shall end at death, the care of these earthly things. But, we are all *immortal*, and each of us shall be eternally happy or eternally miserable in the next life.

But the misfortune is, the greater part of mankind is solicitous for the present and never thinks of the future. *Oh, that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!* (Deut. xxxii. 29). Oh! that they knew how to detach themselves from present goods which last but a short time, and to provide for eternity -- where there will be a never-ending reign in Heaven, or never-ending slavery in hell. St. Philip Neri, conversing one day with Francis Zazzera, a young man of talent who expected to make a fortune in the world, said to him: "You will realize a great fortune; you will be a prelate, afterwards a Cardinal, and in the end, perhaps, Pope! But what must follow? What must follow? Go, my son, think on these words." The young man departed, and after meditating on the words: *What must follow? What must follow?* he renounced his prospects in this world, and gave himself entirely to God. He entered the Congregation of St. Philip, and died a holy death.

The fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. vii. 31). On this passage, Cornelius a Lapide says that "the world is as it were a stage." Happy the man who acts his part well by saving his soul. But if he shall have spent his life in the acquisition of riches and worldly honours, he shall justly be called a fool; and at the hour

of death he shall earn the reproach addressed to the rich man in the Gospel: *Fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?* (Luke xii. 20). In explaining the words, *they require*, Toletus says, that the Lord has given us our souls that we may guard them against the assaults of our enemies; and that at death the Angel will come to demand them of us, and present them at the tribunal of Jesus Christ. But if we shall have lost our souls by attending only to the acquisition of earthly possessions, these shall belong to us no longer; they shall pass to other hands: and what shall then become of our souls?

Poor worldlings! Of all the riches they have acquired, of all the pomps they displayed in this life, what shall they find at death? *They have slept their sleep: and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands* (Ps. lxxv. 6). The dream of this present life shall be over at death, and they shall have acquired nothing for eternity. Ask the many great men of this earth -- the princes and emperors who during life abounded in riches, honours, and pleasures, and are at this moment in hell -- ask them what now remains of all the riches they possessed in this world! They answer with tears: "Nothing! Nothing!" And of so many honours enjoyed -- of so many past pleasures -- of so many pomps and triumphs, ask them what now remains! They answer with howlings: "Nothing! Nothing!"

Justly, then, has St. Francis Xavier said, that in the world there is but one good and one evil. The one good is the salvation of our souls; the one evil is losing them. Hence David said: *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this I will seek after -- that I may dwell in the house of the Lord* (Ps. xxvi. 4). One thing only have I sought, and will forever seek, from God -- that He may grant me the grace to save my soul; for, if I save my soul, all is safe; if I lose it, all is lost for ever!

Evening Meditation

"THE LORD MY REFUGE AND MY DELIVERER"

I.

The groans of death surrounded me and the sorrows of hell encompassed me, and in my affliction I called upon the Lord and he heard my voice... The Lord is my refuge and my deliverer (Introit of Mass. Ps.

xvii).

In your desolation, and when creatures are unable to comfort you, have recourse to your Creator and say to Him: "Lord, men have only words for me." *My friends are full of words! Verbosi amici mei!* (Job xvi. 21). They cannot comfort me; neither do I desire to be comforted by them: Thou art all my hope, all my love. Do Thou help me." Your God loves you more than you can love yourself, what, then, should you fear? *O thou of little faith why didst thou doubt?* (Matt. xiv. 31).

God has declared that He shows favour towards those who put their confidence in Him. *He is the protector of all that trust in him* (Ps. xvii. 31). Whenever you doubt about our Lord hearing your prayer represent to yourself that He is chiding you as He did St. Peter, saying: *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?* (Matt. xiv. 31). Why dost thou doubt My hearing thee, knowing as thou dost the promise I have made to grant the requests of every one that prays to Me?

And because God is willing to grant our requests it is His will that we believe that He certainly will grant them whenever we ask Him for graces: *All things whatsoever you ask, when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you* (Mark xi. 24). Observe the words, *believe that you shall receive*; for they show that we must ask God for graces with a sure, unhesitating confidence that we shall receive them, as St. James also exhorts us: *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering* (James, i. 6). In dealing with our God Who is all goodness, have great confidence, and rid yourself of everything like sadness. He who serves God and is sad, instead of honouring Him, treats Him rather with dishonour. St. Bernard tells us that he wrongs God who represents Him to himself as harsh and severe; being, as He is, Goodness and Mercy Itself. "How can you entertain a doubt," says the Saint, "of Jesus pardoning your sins, when He has affixed them to the Cross whereon He died for you, with the very nails by which His own hands were pierced?"

God declares that His delights are to be with us: *My delights are to be with the children of men* (Prov. viii. 31). If, then, it is God's delight to treat with us, it is only just that all our delights should consist in treating with Him; and this thought should give us

courage to treat with God with every confidence, endeavouring to spend all that remains of life to us with our God Who loves us so much, and in Whose company we hope to be in Heaven for all eternity.

O my crucified Jesus, have pity upon me! I deserve every kind of suffering for such great sins as mine have been. However disconsolate, however abandoned by Thee, I protest it is my will ever to love Thee and bless Thee. Provided Thou dost not deprive me of the grace to love Thee, deal with me as Thou pleasest. Lord, take not away Thyself from me, but take all else besides as may seem good in Thy sight. Help Thy servant whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood.

II.

Let us, then, treat Him with all confidence and love, as our most dear and affectionate Friend Who loves us more than any other. Alas! some souls treat God as if He were a tyrant, from whose subjects only reserve and fear are required; and consequently, they are apprehensive that, at every word inconsiderately spoken, at every thought which crosses their mind, God is angry with them, and disposed to cast them into hell. No; God does not take His grace away from us except when we knowingly and deliberately despise Him and turn our backs upon Him. And when, by some venial fault we slightly offend Him, He is certainly displeased by it, but does not therefore take from us the love which He bears towards us; whence by an act of contrition or of love, He is at once appeased. His infinite Majesty may justly claim all reverence and self-abasement from us; but He is better pleased that the souls that love Him should treat Him with loving confidence rather than with timid servility. So do not treat God as a tyrant. Recall to your mind the graces which He has bestowed upon you, even after the offences and acts of ingratitude which you have committed against Him; recollect the loving treatment which He has dealt out towards you, in order to extricate you from the disorders of your past life, and the extraordinary lights He has given you, by means of which He has so often called you to His holy love; and so treat Him from this day forth with great confidence and affection, as the dearest object of your love.

O my Jesus, I wish to be all Thine own, cost me what it may. I wish to love Thee with all my strength, but what can I myself do? Thy Blood is my hope. O Mary, Mother of God, my refuge, neglect not to pray for me in my tribulations. In the Blood of Jesus Christ, and then in thy prayers do I place my eternal salvation. In thee, O Lady have I hoped; I shall not be confounded for ever. Obtain for me the grace ever to love my God in life and in eternity. I ask for nothing more.

Monday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation

THE LOVE OF GOD

I. - THE LOVE AND GOODNESS OF GOD TOWARDS US

As long as God has been God He has loved us. As long as He has loved Himself He has loved us. *Let us, therefore, love God, because God hath first loved us* (1 Jo. iv. 10).

I.

Consider that God deserves your love, because He loved you before you loved Him, and because He has been the first of all to love you. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* (Jer. xxxi. 3). Your parents have been the first to love you on this earth; but they have loved you only since they have known you. Before your father or your mother came into this world, God loved you: even before the world was created, He loved you. And how long before the creation of the world did God love you? Perhaps a thousand years, or a thousand ages? It is useless to count years or ages; God has loved you from eternity. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee* (Jer. xxxi. 3). In a word, as long as He has been God, He has loved you; as long as He has loved Himself, He has loved you. 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. My God has been the first to love me; it is but just, then, that I should consecrate all my love to Him alone.

Thus God has loved you from eternity, and through pure love has taken you from among so many men whom He could

create; He has given you existence, and has placed you in the world. For the love of you God has created so many other beautiful creatures, that they might serve you, and remind you of the love He has borne to you, and of the love you owe to Him. "Heaven and earth," says St. Augustine, "tell me to love Thee." When the Saint looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, they appeared to him to speak, and say: "Augustine, love your God; for He has created us for you, that you might love Him." The Abbot de Rance, Founder of La Trappe, when he saw a hill, a fountain, or a flower, would say that all these creatures upbraided him with ingratitude to God. In holding a flower or fruit in her hand, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi felt her heart wounded as it were by a dart of Divine love, and would say within herself: "Then, my God has from eternity thought of creating this flower or fruit, that I might love Him."

O sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth, infinite Good, infinite Majesty, Who hast loved men so tenderly, how does it happen that Thou art so much despised by them? But among these men, Thou, O my God, hast loved me in a particular manner, and hast bestowed on me special graces which Thou hast not given to so many others. And I have despised Thee more than others. I prostrate myself at Thy feet; O Jesus, my Saviour, *Cast me not away from thy face!* (Ps. l. 13). I should deserve to be cast off on account of my ingratitude to Thee. But Thou hast said that Thou wilt not reject a penitent soul that returns to Thee. *Him that cometh to me, I will not cast out* (Jo. vi. 37).

II.

Consider, moreover, the special love God has shown to you in allowing you to be born in a Christian country, and in the bosom of the true Church. How many are born among idolaters, Jews, Mohammedans, or heretics, and are all lost! The number of those who have the happiness of being born in a country where the true Faith prevails, is small, compared with the rest of mankind; and He has chosen you to be one of that small number. Oh, what an infinite gift is the gift of Faith! How many millions are deprived of the Sacraments, of sermons, of the examples of good companions, and of all the other helps to salvation which are found in the true Church! And God is resolved to

give all these great helps to you without any merit on your part, and even with a foreknowledge of your demerits; for when He thought of creating you, and bestowing these graces upon you, He foresaw the insults you would offer to Him.

My Jesus, I am sorry for having offended Thee. Hitherto I have not known Thee. I now acknowledge Thee for my Lord and Redeemer, Who hast died to save me and to be loved by me. When, O my Jesus, shall I cease to be ungrateful to Thee? When shall I begin truly to love Thee with a true love? Behold, I this day resolve to love Thee with my whole heart, and to love nothing but Thee. O infinite Goodness, I adore Thee for all those who do not adore Thee, and I love Thee for all who do not love Thee. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, and offer my whole being to Thee. Assist me by Thy grace; Thou knowest my weakness. But if Thou didst bestow so many graces upon me when I neither loved nor desired to love Thee, how much greater graces should I hope for from Thy mercy now that I love Thee and desire only to love Thee! My Lord, give me Thy love, but a fervent love which will make me forget all creatures: a strong love, which will make me conquer all difficulties in order to please Thee; a constant love, which will never be dissolved between me and Thee. I hope for all graces through Thy merits, O my Jesus. And I hope for them through thy intercession, O my Mother, Mary.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

V. - PATIENCE

St. James says that Patience is the perfect work of a soul: *Patience hath a perfect work* (James i. 4). It is by Patience that we are to obtain Heaven. This world is the place for meriting, and hence not a place of repose, but of labour and suffering. For this end God has given us life, that by patience we may obtain the glory of Heaven. In this world all must have their sufferings: he who suffers with patience suffers less, and is saved; he who suffers with impatience, suffers more and is lost. Our Lord does not send us crosses that we may be lost, as certain impatient souls would tell us, but that we may be saved and merit greater glory in Heaven. Sorrows, adversities, and all other tribulations

received with patience, become the most beautiful jewels in our heavenly crown. When, therefore, we are in affliction, let us take comfort and thank God for them, for it is a sign that God desires to save us. He chastises us in this life, in which chastisements are light and short, that He may spare us in the next, in which chastisements are grievous and eternal. Unhappy the sinner who is prosperous in this life! It is a sign that God reserves for him an eternal chastisement.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: "Pain, however great, becomes sweet when we look upon Jesus Christ on the Cross." St. Joseph Calasantius adds: "He gains not Jesus Christ who suffers not for Jesus Christ." He, then, who loves Jesus Christ, supports with patience all external crosses, infirmities, pains, poverty, dishonour, loss of parents and friends; and all interior crosses, anguish, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit; and suffers all in peace. On the contrary, what does he gain, who, in tribulations, becomes impatient and angry? He does but increase his sufferings, and lays up for himself greater sufferings for another life. St. Teresa writes: "The cross is felt by those who drag it by compulsion: but not by those who embrace it with a good will." Hence, St. Philip Neri says: "In this world there is no purgatory, but a heaven or a hell: heaven for those who patiently support tribulations, and hell for those who do not." To proceed to the practice.

First -- Patience must be practised in sickness. The time of illness tests the spirit of a man whether it be gold or lead. Some are all devotion and happiness when in good health; but when visited by some illness they lose patience, complain of everything, and give themselves up to melancholy, and commit a thousand other faults. The gold turns out to be lead! St. Joseph Calasantius said: "If the sick were patient, we should hear no more complaints." Some complain and say: "But as long as I am in this state, I cannot go to church, nor to Communion, nor to Mass; in short, I can do nothing." You say you can do *nothing*. You do *everything* when you do the will of God. Tell me, why do you want to do those things you mention? Is it to give pleasure to God? This is the pleasure of God, that you should embrace with patience all you have to endure, and should leave alone every-

thing else that you wish to do. "God is served," writes St. Francis de Sales, "more by suffering for Him than by working for Him."

If in our sickness there be danger of death, then especially must we accept it with all patience, being willing to die should the end of our life be really at hand. Neither let us speak thus: "But I am not now prepared; I should like to live a little longer to do penance for my sins." And how do you know that if you were to live longer, you would do penance and not fall into greater sins? How many there are who, after recovering from some mortal illness, became worse than they were before, and were lost; while, perhaps, if they had died then, they would have been saved! If it is the will of God that you should leave this world, unite yourself to His holy will, and thank Him for giving you the help of the holy Sacraments, and accept death with tranquillity, abandoning yourself into the arms of His mercy. This compliance with the Divine will, by accepting death, will be sufficient to insure your eternal salvation.

In the second place, we must accept also with patience the death of relations and friends. Some on the death of a relation are so inconsolable, that they leave off saying their prayers, frequenting the Sacraments, and all their devotions. Such a one goes so far as even to be angry with God and to say: "Lord, why hast Thou done it!" What rashness this is! Tell me, what does all your grief profit you? Do you perhaps think to give pleasure to the dead friend? No. You displease both him and God. He desires that through his death you become more united to God, and pray for him if he be in Purgatory.

Evening Meditation

PRAYER

II. - ITS NECESSITY

I.

Let us reflect on the necessity of prayer. St. Chrysostom says that as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without prayer is dead. He also teaches that as water is necessary for plants, so is prayer necessary to save us from perdition. *God wills that all men should be saved* (1 Tim. ii. 4) -- and wills not that any one be lost. *The Lord... dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance* (2

Pet. iii. 9). But He also wishes that we ask Him for the graces necessary for salvation. For on the one hand, it is impossible for us to observe the Divine commands and save our souls without the actual assistance of God; and on the other, God will not, ordinarily speaking, give us His graces unless we ask them from Him. Hence the Holy Council of Trent has declared that God has not commanded impossibilities; because He either gives us the proximate and actual grace to fulfil His precepts, or He gives us the grace to ask Him for this actual assistance. St. Augustine teaches that God gives without prayer the first graces, such as vocation to the Faith and to repentance; but all other graces, and particularly the gift of perseverance, He gives only to those who ask them. Hence theologians teach, that for adults prayer is necessary as a means of salvation; so that, without prayers, it is impossible to be saved.

Ah, my Redeemer, how have I been able hitherto to live in such forgetfulness of Thee! Thou wert prepared to grant me all the graces I should ask of Thee; Thou didst only wait for me to ask them. But I have thought only of indulging my passions, and have been indifferent to the privation and loss of Thy love and Thy graces. Lord, forget my ingratitude, and have mercy on me. Pardon me all the displeasure I have given Thee, and grant me perseverance.

II.

The Scriptures are clear. For we read: *We ought always to pray* (Luke xviii. 1). *Pray, lest ye enter into temptation* (Luke xxii. 40). *Ask and you shall receive* (Jo. xvi. 24). *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. v. 17). The words *we ought, pray, ask*, according to St. Thomas and theologians generally, imply a strict precept which binds under grievous sin, particularly in three cases. First, when a person is in a state of sin; secondly, when he is in danger of death; and thirdly, when he is in great danger of falling into sin. Theologians teach that, ordinarily, he who neglects prayer for a month, or at most for two months, is guilty of a mortal sin. The reason is, because prayer is a means without which we cannot obtain the helps necessary for salvation.

Ask and you shall receive. He who asks receives: then, says St. Teresa, he who does not ask does not receive. And before, St.

James said the same. *You have not, because you ask not* (James iv. 2). Prayer is particularly necessary to obtain the virtue of continence. *And*, said the Wise Man, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it... I went to the Lord and besought him* (Wis. viii. 21). Let us conclude that he who prays is certainly saved; he who does not pray is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer. And their greatest despair is, and shall be for ever, caused by the conviction, that they had it in their power to save their souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.

O God of my soul, give me the grace always to ask Thy aid not to offend Thee. Do not permit me to be, as I have hitherto been, negligent in the performance of this duty. Grant me light and strength always to recommend myself to Thee, and particularly when my enemies tempt me to offend Thee again. Grant, O my God, this grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the love which Thou bearest to Him. O Lord, I have offended Thee enough. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life. Give me Thy love; and may this love remind me to ask Thy aid whenever I am in danger of losing Thee by sin. Mary, my hope after Jesus, through thy intercession I hope for the grace to recommend myself in all my temptations to thee and to thy Son. Hear me, O my Queen, through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ.

Tuesday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation

THE LOVE OF GOD

II. -- GOD HAS GIVEN HIMSELF TO US.

Accursed sin robbed us of Divine grace and made us the slaves of hell, but, to the astonishment of Heaven and of all nature, the Son of God came on earth as Man in order to redeem us from eternal death and purchase for us grace and eternal glory which we had lost. *He emptied himself taking the form of a servant ... and in habit found as a man* (Phil. ii. 7).

I.

God has given us many beautiful creatures, indeed, but He was not content until He even gave us Himself. *Christ hath*

loved us and hath delivered himself for us (Eph. v. 2). Accursed sin had robbed us of Divine grace, and made us the slaves of hell; but, to the astonishment of Heaven and of all nature, the Son of God came on earth as Man in order to redeem us from eternal death, and purchase for us grace and the eternal glory which we had lost. How great would be our wonder if we saw a monarch become a worm for the love of worms! But our astonishment should be infinitely greater at the sight of God made Man for the love of men. *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... and in habit found as man* (Phil. ii. 7). God clothed in flesh! *And the word was made flesh* (Jo. i. 14). But the astonishment increases when we see all that the Son of God has done and suffered for the love of us. To redeem us it would have been sufficient for Him to shed a single drop of His Blood, or a single tear, or to offer a single prayer; for a prayer offered by a Divine Person would be of infinite value, and therefore sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, and of an infinite number of worlds. But, says St. Chrysostom, what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for the immense love that God bore to us. He not only wished to save us, but, because He loved us ardently, He wished to be loved ardently by us; and therefore He resolved to lead a life full of sorrows and humiliations, and to suffer a death the most painful of all deaths, in order to make us understand the infinite love which He entertained for us. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8). O excess of Divine love, which all men and Angels will never be able to comprehend! I say *excess*; for Moses and Elias, speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ, called it an *excess*. (Luke ix. 31). St. Bonaventure called the Passion of Christ an "excess of sorrow and of love."

O my Jesus, I see that Thou couldst have done nothing more in order to compel me to love Thee; and I also see that by my ingratitude I have laboured to force Thee to abandon me. Blessed forever be Thy patience which has borne with me so long. I deserve a hell made on purpose for myself; but Thy death gives me confidence. Ah! make me understand well the claims which Thou, O infinite Good, hast to my love, and the obligations by which I am bound to love Thee. I knew, O my Jesus, that Thou

didst die for me; how then, O God, have I been able to live for so many years in forgetfulness of Thee? Oh that the past years of my life were to commence again! I would wish, O my Lord, to give them all to Thee. But years do not return. Ah, grant that I may at least spend all the remaining days of my life in loving and pleasing Thee.

II.

If our Redeemer had not been God, but a friend or a relative, what greater proof of love could He have given, than to die for us? *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jo. xv. 13). If Jesus Christ had to save His own Father, He could not have done more for the love of Him! If you had been God and the Creator of Jesus Christ, what more could He have done for you than sacrifice His life in the midst of a sea of torments and sorrows, for the love of you? If the most contemptible man on earth had done for you what Jesus Christ has done for you, could you live without loving him?

But what do you say? Do you believe in the Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ? You believe these Mysteries; and do you not love Him? Or, can you think of loving anything but Jesus Christ? He came on earth to suffer and to die for you in order to make known to you the immense love which He bears you. Before the Incarnation, man might doubt whether God loved him tenderly; but how, after the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, can he any longer doubt that God loves him with the most tender love? And what greater tenderness of affection could Jesus show you, than to sacrifice His Divine life for the love of you? Our ears are accustomed to hear the words -- Creation, Redemption, God in a manger, God on a Cross! O holy Faith, enlighten us!

My dear Redeemer, I love Thee with my whole heart; but increase this love within me. Remind me always of all that Thou hast done for me; and do not permit me to be any longer ungrateful to Thee. No; I will no longer resist the lights Thou hast given me. Thou didst wish to be loved by me, and I desire to love Thee. And whom shall I love, if I do not love a God of infinite beauty and infinite goodness, a God Who has died for me, a God Who has borne with me with so much patience, and Who,

instead of chastising me as I deserved, has changed chastisements into graces and favours? Yes; I love Thee, O God, worthy of infinite love, and I sigh and seek to live wholly employed in loving Thee, and forgetful of everything but Thee. O infinite charity of my Lord, assist a soul that ardently desires to be entirely Thine. O great Mother of God, Mary, do thou, too, assist me by thy intercession; beg of Jesus to make me belong entirely to Him.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

V. -- PATIENCE (continued)

Thirdly: We must accept of poverty, if God sends it to us. Should you be in need of even necessities, say, "My God, Thou alone art sufficient for me." An act of this kind would gain for you treasures in Heaven. He who possesses God has all good. And hence we should bear with patience the loss of property, the failure of our expectations, and even the loss of those upon whom we depended. We must be resigned to the will of God, and God will support us; and if He be not pleased to help us, as we desire, we must be content with what He is pleased to do, because He does it to make trial of our patience, and to enrich us with greater merits and heavenly glory.

Fourthly: We must accept with patience contempt and persecutions. You will say: "But what evil have I done, that I should be thus persecuted? Why should I suffer this affront?" Complain thus to Jesus Christ crucified and He will answer you: "And what evil have I done, that I should suffer so many torments, ignominies, and this death of the Cross?" If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered all this for the love of you, it is no great thing that you should suffer this for the love of Jesus Christ. And especially if you have ever committed a very grievous sin, reflect that for it you deserve to be now in hell, where much greater sufferings and persecutions are endured from merciless devils. If you suffer any persecutions for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake* (Matt. v. 10). Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united to Jesus Christ in

this world must be persecuted.

In the fifth place, we must practise patience also in spiritual desolation which is the heaviest affliction for a soul that loves God. But it is in this way God proves the love of His beloved ones. At such times let us humble ourselves and be resigned to the will of God, putting ourselves entirely into His hands. Let us be most careful also not to leave off any of our devotions, our prayers, frequenting of the Sacraments, our Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, or our Spiritual Reading. As we do everything then with weariness and trouble, it seems to us to be all lost, but it is not so: while we persevere in all these things, we work without any satisfaction to ourselves; but it is all very pleasing to God.

In the sixth and last place, we must practise patience in temptations. Some cowardly souls, when a temptation lasts a long time are disheartened, and will sometimes even say: God, then, desires my damnation. No; God permits us to be tempted, not for our damnation, but for our advantage, that we may then humble ourselves the more, and unite ourselves more closely to Him, by forcing ourselves to resist, redoubling our prayers, and thereby acquiring greater merits for Heaven. *And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee* (Tob. xii. 13). Thus was it said to Tobias. Every temptation we overcome, gains for us fresh degrees of glory, and greater strength to resist future temptations. Nor does God ever permit us to be tempted beyond our strength: *And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it* (1 Cor. x. 13).

We should, indeed, beg our Lord to deliver us from temptations. However, when they come let us resign ourselves to His holy will, beseeching Him to give us strength to resist. St. Paul was troubled with carnal temptations, and he prayed to God to deliver him from them, but the Lord said to him: *My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity* (2 Cor. xii. 9). In sensual temptations especially, the first precaution to be taken is to remove ourselves as far as possible from all occasions, and then immediately to have recourse to Jesus Christ for help, not

trusting in our own strength. And when the temptation continues, let us not cease to pray, saying: "Jesus, help me! Mary, ever Virgin, assist me!" The mere invocation of these all-powerful Names of *Jesus* and *Mary* will suffice to defeat the most violent assaults of hell. It is also of great use to make the sign of the Cross on our forehead, or over our heart. By the Sign of the Cross, St. Anthony, Abbot, overcame similar attacks of the devil. It is also a very good thing to acquaint your spiritual father with your temptations. St. Philip Neri used to say: "A temptation which is revealed is half conquered."

Evening Meditation

PRAYER

III. -- THE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER

Many pray but do not obtain the object of their prayers, because they do not pray as they ought. *You ask*, says St. James, *and receive not, because you ask amiss* (iv. 3). To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility. *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* (Ibid. iv. 6). God rejects the petitions of the proud but does not allow the humble to depart without hearing all their prayers. *The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds ... and he will not depart till the Most High behold* (Ecclus. xxxv. 21). This holds, even in the case of sinners. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 1. 19). Secondly, it is necessary to pray with confidence. *No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded* (Ecclus. ii. 11). Jesus Christ has taught us to call God, in our petitions for His graces, by no other name than that of "Father," in order to make us pray with the same confidence with which a child has recourse to a parent. He, then, who prays with confidence, obtains every grace. *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you* (Mark xi. 24). And who, says St. Augustine, can fear that the promises of God, Who is Truth Itself, will be violated? God, says the Scripture, is not like men, who promise, but do not perform, either because they intend to deceive, or because they change their minds. *God is not as man, that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that he should be changed. Hath he said them, and will he not do?* (Num. xxiii. 19). And why, adds the same St. Augustine, should the Lord so earnestly exhort

us to ask His graces, if He did not wish to bestow them upon us? By His promises He bound Himself to grant us the graces we ask of Him.

But some will say: I am a sinner, and therefore I do not deserve to be heard. In answer, St. Thomas says that the efficacy of prayer to obtain graces, depends, not on our merits, but on the Divine Mercy. *Every one*, says Jesus Christ, *that asketh receiveth* (Luke xi. 10) -- that is, every one, whether he be a just man or a sinner. But the Redeemer himself takes away all fear, saying: *Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you* (Jo. xvi. 23). As if He said: Sinners, if you are without merit, I have merit before My Father. Ask, then, in My Name, and I promise that you shall receive whatsoever you ask. But it is necessary to know that this promise does not extend to temporal favours, such as health, and the like; for God often justly refuses these favours, because He sees that they would be injurious to our salvation. "The physician," says St. Augustine, "knows better than the patient, what is useful to him." The holy Doctor adds, that God refuses to some in His mercy, what He gives to others in His wrath. Hence we should ask temporal blessings only on condition that they shall be profitable to the soul. But spiritual graces, such as pardon of sins, perseverance, Divine love, and the like, should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them. *If*, says Jesus Christ, *you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good spirit to them that ask him?* (Luke xi. 13).

II.

Above all, perseverance in prayer is necessary. Cornelius a Lapide says, that the Lord "wishes us to persevere in prayer even to importunity." This may be inferred from the following passages of Scripture: *We ought always to pray* (Luke xviii. 1). *Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times* (Luke xxi. 36). *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. v. 17). It may also be inferred from our Lord's repeated exhortations to prayer. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you* (Luke xi. 9). It might be sufficient to have said *ask*; but no; the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not

cease *to ask, to entreat, and to knock* at the gate until they receive an alms. But *final perseverance* in particular, is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer. We cannot *merit* this grace of perseverance; but, according to St. Augustine, it may be merited in a certain manner. "This gift," says the holy doctor, "can be suppliantly merited; that is, it may be obtained by supplication." Let us, then, if we wish to be saved, pray always, and never cease to pray. And let all confessors and preachers, if they desire the salvation of souls, never cease to exhort their penitents or hearers to prayer. And, in conformity with the advice of St. Bernard, let us always have recourse to the intercession of Mary, "for what she asks she obtains, and her prayer cannot be fruitless."

My God, I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me; but my enemies will not cease to fight against me till death. Unless Thou dost assist me, I shall lose Thee again. Ah, through the merits of Jesus Christ, I ask for holy perseverance. Do not permit me to be separated from Thee. And I ask the same grace for all who are at present in the state of grace. I hope with certainty in Thy promise, and that Thou wilt give me perseverance if I shall continue to ask it from Thee. But I fear that in my temptations I shall neglect to have recourse to Thee, and that thus I shall relapse into sin. I therefore ask of Thee the grace never more to neglect prayer. Grant that in the occasions in which I shall be in danger of relapsing, I may recommend myself to Thee, and may invoke the most holy Names of *Jesus* and *Mary*. My God, this I purpose and hope to do with the assistance of Thy grace. Hear me for the sake of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my Mother, obtain for me the grace, that in all dangers of losing God, I may have recourse to thee and thy Son.

Wednesday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation

THE LOVE OF GOD

III. -- THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION

I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised, said Jesus, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished (Luke xii. 50). I am to be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood, and I feel myself

dying through a desire that My Passion and death may come soon that thus man may know the love I bear him. Ah, my Jesus, men do not love Thee because they do not think of the love Thou hast had for them.

I.

Our astonishment increases more and more when we consider the ardour with which Jesus Christ desired to suffer and die for the love of us. *I have a baptism*, said Jesus Christ, *wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished* (Luke xii. 50). I am to be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood; and I feel Myself dying through a desire that My Passion and death may soon come, that thus man may know the love I bear to him. It was this desire that made Jesus say on the night before His Passion: *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer* (Luke xxii. 15). Then, says St. Basil of Seleucia, it appears that our God cannot be satiated with loving men.

Ah, my Jesus, men do not love Thee because they do not think of the love Thou hast had for them. O God! how is it possible for a soul to live without loving God, if she considers that He died for her sake and died with so great a desire of showing His love for her? *The charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14). St. Paul says that it is not so much what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our salvation, as the love He displayed in suffering for us, that obliges, and, as it were, forces us to love Him. Contemplating the love which Jesus Christ exhibits in His Passion, St. Laurence Justinian exclaimed: We have seen Wisdom Itself as it were foolish, through the excess of love for us. And who could ever believe, had not Faith assured us of it, that the Creator should die for His own creatures? In an ecstasy, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, holding a Crucifix in her hands, exclaimed: "Yes, my Jesus, Thou art foolish through love." This the Gentiles also said when they heard the Apostles preaching the death of Jesus Christ. They regarded it as a folly which could not be believed. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23). And how, said they, could a God that is most happy in Himself, and stands not in need of anyone, descend on earth to become Man and die for the love of men who are His creatures? This would be the same as to believe

that a God had become foolish for the sake of men. But it is of Faith that Jesus Christ the true Son of God, delivered Himself to death for the love of us. *Christ hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2).

Ah, my dear Redeemer, it is true that I have not loved Thee, because I have not reflected on the love Thou hast borne me! Ah, my Jesus, I have been very ungrateful to Thee. Thou hast given Thy life for me by submitting to the most painful of all deaths; and have I been so ungrateful as not even to think of Thy sufferings? Pardon me; I promise, O my crucified Love, that from this day forward Thou shalt be the only object of my thoughts and of all my affections! Ah, when the devil or the world presents me with forbidden fruit, remind me, O my beloved Saviour, of the pains Thou hast endured for my sake, that I may love Thee, and may never more offend Thee! Ah, if one of my servants had done for me what Thou hast done, I could not bring myself to displease him. And I have dared to turn my back so often on Thee Who hast died for me.

II.

He has done so that we may live no longer to the world, but only to that Lord Who has died for us. *Christ died for all, that they also who live may not live to themselves, but unto him who died for them* (2 Cor. v. 15). He has done it, that, by the love which He has shown us, He might win all the love of our hearts. *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). Hence the Saints, contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, thought it very little to give their life and all things for the love of so a loving a God. How many nobles, how many princes have left relatives, riches, and country, and even kingdoms, to shut themselves away in a cloister, in order to live only to the love of Jesus Christ! How many Martyrs have sacrificed their lives! How many tender virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the great, have gone with joy to death, in order thus to make some return for the affection of a God who died for their sake! And what have you hitherto done for the sake of Jesus Christ? As He has died for the Saints -- for St. Lawrence, for St. Lucy, for St. Agnes, so He has also died for you. What do you intend to do during the remaining days of life which God gives you

that you may love Him? From this day forward, look frequently on the Crucifix, and in looking on it, call to mind the love which Jesus Christ has borne you, and say: *Then, hast Thou, my God, died for me?* Do this at least, I say, and do it often; if you do, you cannot but feel yourself sweetly constrained to love a God Who has loved you so tenderly.

O beautiful flames which have obliged a God to give His life for me, come, inflame, fill my whole heart, and destroy all affections towards created things. Ah! my beloved Redeemer, how is it possible for me to contemplate Thee, either in the Manger in Bethlehem, on the Cross on Calvary, or in the Sacrament on our Altars, and not be enamoured of Thee? My Jesus, I love Thee with my whole soul. During the remaining years of my life thou shalt be my only Good, my only Love. I have unhappily lived long enough forgetful of Thy Passion and of Thy love. I give Thee all things, and if I do not give myself to Thee as I ought, take me, and reign in my whole heart. *Thy kingdom come!* May my heart be the servant of Thy love. May I speak of nothing else, may I sigh and desire only to love and please Thee. Assist me always by Thy grace, that I may be faithful to Thee. In Thy merits I trust, O my Jesus. O Mother of fair love, make me ardently love thy Son Who is so amiable, and Who has loved me so tenderly.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

VI. -- CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL.

All sanctity consists in loving God; and the love of God consists in fulfilling His holy will. In this is our life: *And life in his will* (Ps. xxix. 6). And he who is united with the will of God is always in peace; for the Divine will takes away the bitterness of every cross. By saying: *God wills it so; God has so willed*, -- holy souls find peace in all their labours: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad* (Prov. xii. 21). You say: Everything goes wrong with me; God sends me all kinds of misfortunes. Things go wrong with you, because you make them go wrong; if you were resigned to the will of God, all would go well, and for your good. The crosses which God sends you are misfortunes, because you make misfortunes of them; if you would accept them with

resignation, they would no longer be misfortunes, but riches for Paradise. Venerable Balthazar Alvarez says: "He who in his troubles resigns himself with peacefulness to the Divine will, runs to God post-haste." Let us now come to the practice.

And first, let us resign ourselves *in the illnesses that befall us*. Worldly people call illnesses misfortunes, but the Saints call them visitations of God and favours. When we are ill we ought certainly to take remedies in order to be cured, but we should always be resigned to whatever God may will. And if we pray for restoration to health, let it always be done with resignation, otherwise we shall not obtain the favour. Oh, how much we gain when we are ill by offering to God all we suffer! He who loves God from his heart does not desire to be cured of his illness in order to avoid suffering, but he desires to please God by suffering. It was this love which made the scourge, the rack, and the burning pitch sweet to the holy Martyrs. We must also be especially resigned when the sickness is mortal. To accept death at such a time, in order that the will of God may be fulfilled, merits for us a reward similar to that of the Martyrs, because they accepted death to please God. He who dies in union with the will of God makes a holy death; and the more closely he is united to it, the more holy the death does he die. The Venerable Blossius declares that an act of perfect conformity to the will of God at the hour of death delivers us not only from hell, but also from Purgatory.

Secondly, we must also unite ourselves to the will of God with regard to our *natural defects*, as, for example, want of talent, being of low birth, weak health, bad sight, want of ability for business, and the like. All that we have is the free gift of God. Might He not have made us a fly or a blade of grass? A hundred years ago we were only nothingness. And what do we want? Let it suffice that God has given us the power of becoming Saints. Although we may have little talent, poor health, and may be poor and abject, we may very well become Saints through His grace if we have the will. Oh, how many unfortunate beings have been damned on account of their talents, their health, high birth, riches or beauty! Let us then be content with what God has done for us; and let us thank Him always for the good things

He has given us, and particularly for having called us to the holy Faith; this is a great gift, and one for which few are found to thank God.

Thirdly, we must resign ourselves *in all adversities* that may happen to us, as the loss of property, disappointments, the death of relatives, the attacks and persecutions of men. You will say: But God does not will sin; how is it that I must resign myself when some one calumniates me, wrongs me, attacks or defrauds me? That cannot happen by the will of God. What a deception is this! God does not, of course, *will the sin* of such a one; He *permits it*; but, on the other hand, He *does will* the trial that you suffer at the hands of that person. So that it is our Lord Himself Who sends you that cross, though it comes to you by means of your neighbour; therefore even in these cases you must embrace the cross as coming from God. Nor let us seek to find a reason for such treatment. St. Teresa says: "If you are willing to bear only those crosses for which you see a reason, perfection is not for you."

Fourthly, we must be resigned *in aridity of soul*; if, when we say our prayers, receive Communion, visit the Blessed Sacrament, etc. all seems to weary and give us no comfort, let us be satisfied in knowing that we please God, and that the less satisfaction we feel ourselves in our devotions the more pleasure do we give Him. At no time can we better realise our own insufficiency and misery than in the time of aridity; and therefore let us humble ourselves in our prayers, and put ourselves with resignation into God's hands, and say: "Lord, I do not deserve consolations; I desire nothing but that Thou have pity on me; keep me in Thy grace, and do with me what Thou wilt." And thus we shall gain more in one day of desolation than in a month of tears and sensible devotion. And generally speaking, this should be the continual tenor of our prayers, offering ourselves to God, that He may do with us as He may please; saying to Him in our prayers, our Communions, and in the Visit: "My God, make me do Thy will." In doing the will of God we do everything. For this end let us accustom ourselves to have always on our lips the ejaculation *Fiat voluntas tua! Thy will be done!* And even in the least things we do; for instance, if we snuff out a candle, break

a glass, stumble over something, let us always repeat: "May the will of God be done!" When we lose any of our possessions, or when one of our relatives dies, let us say: "O Lord, it is Thy will; it is my will also." And when we fear any temporal ill, let us say: "O Lord, I will whatever Thou willest." Thus we shall be very pleasing in the sight of God, and shall always be in peace.

Evening Meditation

HOW MUCH IT PLEASES JESUS CHRIST THAT WE SUFFER FOR LOVE OF HIM

I.

If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke ix. 23).

Jesus Christ says: *If any one will come after me*. He does not say *to me*; but, *after me*. The Lord desires that we should come close after Him. We must therefore walk in the same road of thorns and sufferings in which He walked. He goes before and rests not until He reaches Calvary where He dies. Wherefore if we love Him we must follow Him even unto death. Thus it is necessary that every one should deny himself; that is deny himself in everything self-love demands, and that is not pleasing to Jesus Christ.

Our Lord says further: *Let him take up his cross daily and follow me*. *Let him take up*; it avails little to carry the cross by compulsion. All sinners bear it, but without merit; to bear it with merit, we must embrace it voluntarily. *His cross*; under this word is implied every kind of tribulation, which is called a *cross* by Jesus Christ, in order that the name may render it sweet, from the remembrance that He died on the Cross for the love of us.

O my Jesus, Thou alone hast been able to teach us these maxims of salvation, all contrary to the maxims of the world; and Thou alone canst give us strength to suffer crosses with patience. I do not pray Thee to exempt me from suffering; I only pray Thee to give me strength to suffer with patience and resignation.

II.

Jesus also says *his cross*. Some persons when they receive spiritual consolations, offer themselves to suffer as great things as were endured by the Martyrs, -- hot irons, piercing nails and

tortures; but then they cannot endure a headache, the carelessness of a friend, the ill-temper of a relative. God does not ask you to endure hot irons, piercing nails, and tortures; but He desires that you should suffer patiently this pain, this annoyance, this contempt. Some people would fain go to suffer in a desert, and perform great acts of penance; but yet they cannot endure such a one for Superior, or such a one for their companion in their duties; but God desires that we should bear that cross which He gives us to suffer, and not that which we would ourselves choose.

He says *daily*. Some persons embrace the cross at the beginning, when it comes to them; but when it lasts long they say, "Now I can bear no more." Yet God wills that we should go on to endure it with patience, and that we should bear it continually and even till death. See, then, that salvation and perfection consist in these three words, *let him deny*; we must deny to our self-love whatever is not right: *let him take up*; we must embrace the cross that God gives us: *let him follow*; we must follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ even unto death.

O Eternal Father, Thy Son has promised that whatever we ask Thee in His Name, Thou wilt give it to us. Behold, we ask this of Thee: give us grace to endure with patience the pains of this life; hear us for the love of Jesus Christ. And Thou, O my Jesus, pardon me all the offences I have committed against Thee, in that I have not been willing to suffer with patience the troubles Thou hast sent me. Give me Thy love, that it may impart strength to suffer all for love of Thee. Deprive me of everything, of every earthly good, of relatives, friends, health of body, of every comfort; deprive me even of life; but not of Thy love. Give me Thyself, and I ask no more. O most holy Virgin, obtain for me an enduring love of Jesus Christ, even till death.

Thursday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation

DIVINE LOVE CONQUERS ALL THINGS.

The soul cannot exist without loving the Creator or creatures. Given a soul that is weaned of every other love, you will find it filled with Divine love. Do we wish to know whether we have given ourselves wholly to God? Let us examine ourselves

whether we are weaned from every thing or not.

I.

Love is strong as death (Cant. viii. 6). As death separates us from all the goods of the world, from riches, honours, kindred, friends, and all earthly pleasures, so does the love of God, when it reigns in a heart, strip it of all affection for these perishable advantages. Therefore it was that the Saints stripped themselves of everything the world offered them, renounced their possessions, their posts of honour, and all they had, and fled to deserts or cloisters, to think upon and to love God alone.

Do we wish to know whether we have given ourselves wholly to God? Let us examine ourselves whether we are weaned from every earthly thing or not.

Some persons lament that in their devotions, prayers, Communion, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, they do not find God. To such St. Teresa says: "Detach thy heart from creatures, and then seek God, and thou shalt find Him." Thou wilt not indeed find constant spiritual sweetness, for this God does not give without interruption even to those who love Him in this life, but bestows it only from time to time to make them fly onwards towards those boundless delights which He prepares for them in Paradise. He gives them, however, an inward peace which excels all sensual delights; that peace of God which surpasseth all understanding. And what greater delight can be enjoyed by a soul that loves God than to be able to say with true affection: "My God and my All!" St. Francis of Assisi continued a whole night in an ecstasy of Paradise continually repeating these words: "My God and my All! My God and my All!"

Love is strong as death. If a dying man were to give a sign of moving towards any earthly thing, we should then know that he was not dead; death deprives us of everything.

Divine love strips us of everything. Father Segneri, an eminent servant of God said: "Love of God is a beloved thief which robs us of every earthly thing." Another servant of God, when he had given to the poor all his possessions, and was asked what had reduced him to such poverty, took the Book of the Gospels out of his pocket, and said: "This has robbed me of everything." In a word, Jesus Christ will possess our whole heart, and He will have

no companion there. St. Augustine writes that the Roman Senate refused to allow adoration to be paid to Jesus Christ because He was a haughty God Who claimed to be honoured alone; and truly as He is our only Lord, He has the right to be adored and loved with our undivided love.

II.

St. Francis de Sales says that the pure love of God consumes everything that is not God. When, then, we see in our heart an affection for anything that is not God, or for the sake of God, we must instantly banish it, saying, "Depart! There is no place for thee!" In this consists that complete renunciation which our Lord recommends, if we would be wholly His. It must be complete; that is, renunciation of everything, and especially of our friends and kindred. How many, for the sake of men, have never become Saints! David said that they who *please men* are *despised* by God. (Ps. lii. 6).

But, above all, we must renounce ourselves by conquering self-love. Cursed is self-love, that thrusts itself into everything, even our most holy actions, by placing before us our own love of pleasure! How many preachers, how many writers, have thus lost all their labours! Constantly, even in Prayer, in Spiritual Reading, in Holy Communion, there enters some end not pure, either the desire of being noticed, or of merely obtaining spiritual pleasures. We must, therefore, strive to conquer this enemy who would ruin our best deeds. We must, as far as possible, deprive ourselves of everything that pleases us. We must deprive ourselves of this pleasure, for the very reason that it is agreeable; we must do a service to this ungrateful person, because he is ungrateful; we must take this bitter medicine, because it is bitter. Self-love makes it appear that nothing is good in which we do not find our own personal satisfaction; but he that would wholly belong to God must do violence to himself whenever he is employed in anything that is according to his own pleasure, and say always: "Let me lose everything, provided I please God."

For the rest, no one is more contented in this world than he who despises all the good things of the world. The more he strips himself of such good things, the richer he becomes in Divine grace. Thus does the Lord know how to reward those who love

Him faithfully. But, O my Jesus, Thou knowest my weakness; Thou hast promised to help those who trust in Thee. Lord, I love Thee; in Thee I trust; give me strength, and make me wholly Thine. In thee also I trust, O my sweet advocate, Mary!

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

VII. -- PURITY OF INTENTION

Purity of intention consists in doing everything with the sole view of pleasing God. The good or bad intention with which an action is performed renders it good or bad before God. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: God rewards actions according to the amount of purity of intention with which they are done." Let us examine how this virtue can be practised.

In the first place, in all our devotional exercises, let us seek God and not ourselves: if we seek our own satisfaction we cannot expect to receive any reward from God. And this holds good for all spiritual works. How many labour and exhaust themselves in preaching, hearing confessions, serving at the altar, and in doing other pious works; and because in these they seek themselves and not God, they lose all! When we seek neither approbation nor thanks from others for what we do, it is a sign that we work for God's sake: as also when we are not vexed when the good we undertake does not succeed; or when we rejoice as much at the good that is done by others, as if it had been done by ourselves. Further, whenever we have done some good in order to please God, and are praised for it, let us not torment ourselves in endeavouring to drive away vain-glory; it is enough to say: "To God be the honour and glory." And let us never omit any good action which may be edifying to our neighbour, through fear of vain-glory. Our Lord wishes us to do good even before others, that it may be profitable to them. *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Matt. v. 16). Therefore when you do good, have first the intention of pleasing God; and secondly, that also of giving good example to your neighbour.

In the second place, in our bodily actions; whether we work, eat, drink, or amuse ourselves with propriety, let us do all in order to please God. Purity of intention may be called a heav-

only alchemy which changes iron into gold. By which is meant, that the most trivial and ordinary actions done to please God become acts of Divine love. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say: "A person who performs all his actions with a pure intention will go straight to Paradise." A holy hermit, before putting his hand to any work, used to raise his eyes to Heaven and keep them fixed there for a short time; and when asked what he was doing, he answered: "I am taking my aim, so that I may not miss the mark." Let us also do in like manner: before beginning any action, let us make sure of our aim, and say "Lord, I do this to please Thee."

VIII. -- RULES FOR AVOIDING TEPIDITY

Souls that make no account of venial sins, and give themselves up to tepidity, without a thought of freeing themselves from it, live in great danger. We do not here speak of those venial sins that are committed through mere frailty, such as useless or idle words, interior disquietudes, and negligence in small matters; but we speak of venial sins committed with full deliberation, above all when they are habitual. St. Teresa writes thus: "From all deliberate sin, howsoever small it may be, O Lord, deliver us!" Venerable Alvarez used to say: "Those little backbitings, dislikes, culpable curiosity, acts of impatience and intemperance, do not indeed kill the soul, but they so weaken it, that when any great temptation attacks it unexpectedly, it will not have strength enough to resist, and will consequently fall." So that as on the one hand deliberate venial sins weaken the soul, so on the other they deprive us of the Divine assistance; for it is but just that God should be sparing with those who are sparing towards Him: *He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly* (2 Cor. ix. 6). And this is what a soul that has received special graces from God has the most reason to fear, especially if such faults spring from some passionate attachment, as of ambition, or avarice, or of aversion, or inordinate affection towards any person. It happens not unfrequently to souls that are in bondage to some passion, as it does to gamblers, who, after losing many times, risk all on a final throw and so finish by losing everything. In what a miserable state is that soul which is the slave of some passion. Passion blinds us, and lets us no longer see what we are doing. Let us now see what

we have to do, in order to be able to deliver ourselves from the wretched state of tepidity.

It is necessary in the first place to have a firm desire to get out of this state. The good desire lightens our labour, and gives us strength to go forward. And let us rest assured that he who makes no progress in the way of God will always be going back; and he will go back so far that at last he will fall over some precipice. Secondly, let us try to find out the predominant fault to which we are most attached, whether it be anger, ambition, an inordinate affection to persons or things. A resolute will overcomes all with the help of God. Thirdly, we must avoid the occasion, otherwise all our resolutions will fall to the ground. And lastly, we must above all be diffident of our own strength, and pray continually with all confidence to God, begging Him to help us in the danger in which we are, and to deliver us from those temptations by which we shall fall into sin; which is the meaning of the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." He who prays obtains: *Ask, and you shall receive* (Jo. xvi. 24). This is God's promise, and can never fail; therefore we must always pray, always pray; and let us never leave off repeating: "My God, help me, and help me at once!"

Evening Meditation

GIVING OF OURSELVES TO GOD WITHOUT RESERVE

I.

God has declared that He loves all those who love Him: *I love them that love me* (Prov. viii. 17). But it is not to be supposed that God will give Himself entirely to one who loves anything in the world equally with God. At one time St. Teresa was in this state, keeping up an affection, not indeed an impure affection, but an inordinate one, for a certain relative. When, however, she divested herself of this attachment, God was pleased to say to her in a vision: "Now that thou art wholly Mine, I am wholly thine."

O my God, when will the day arrive when I shall be wholly Thine? Consume within me, I beseech Thee, by the flames of Thy Divine love, all those earthly affections which hinder me from belonging entirely to Thee. When shall I be able to say to Thee with truth: My God, Thee only do I desire, and besides Thee there is nothing that I wish for?

One is my dove, my perfect one, is but one (Cant. vi. 8). God so loves the soul that gives itself entirely to Him that He seems to love no other; and hence He calls it His only dove. St. Teresa after her death revealed to one of her sisters that God has greater love for one soul that aspires to perfection than for a thousand others that are in a state of grace, but are tepid and imperfect. O my God, for how many years hast Thou invited me to become entirely Thine, and I have refused! Death is already approaching, and shall I die as imperfect as I have hitherto lived? No, I hope that death will not find me as ungrateful as I have hitherto been. Help me; for I desire to leave all things to become entirely Thine.

II.

Jesus Christ, through the love which He has for us, has given His whole Self to us. *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2). If, then, says St. Chrysostom, "God has given Himself entirely to you and without reserve: if He has given you all, and nothing more remains for Him to give you, as indeed He has done in His Passion and in the Holy Eucharist, reason requires that you also should give yourself without reserve to Him." St. Francis de Sales says: "The heart is too little to love our bountiful Redeemer Who has loved us even to laying down His life for us." Oh, what ingratitude, what injustice, to divide our hearts, and not to give them wholly to God!

Let us then say with the Spouse in the Canticles: *My beloved to me, and I to my beloved* (Cant. ii. 16). Thou, my God, hast given all to me, I will give all to Thee. I love Thee, my sovereign Good. My God and my All! Thou desirest that I should be all Thine, and such do I desire to be. O Mary, my Mother, pray for me, that I may not love aught but God alone.

Friday after Septuagesima Morning Meditation

HE THAT LOVES JESUS CHRIST SHOULD HATE THE WORLD.

St. Paul writes that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from the present wicked world according to the will of God and our Father. (Gal. i. 4). As the lovers of

God are hateful to the world, so the world ought to be hateful to him who loves God. Jesus Christ desires we should become superior to the promises and threats of the world and no longer take account of its censures or its praise.

I.

Whosoever loves Jesus Christ with true love, let him greatly rejoice when he sees himself treated by the world as Jesus Christ was treated. He was hated, scorned, and persecuted by the world, even unto an agonising death upon a shameful Cross. The world is altogether against Jesus Christ; and, therefore, hating Jesus Christ, it hates all His servants. Wherefore the Lord encouraged His disciples to suffer in peace all the persecutions of the world, saying to them that, having given up the world, they could not but be hated by the world. *Ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you* (Jo. xv. 19).

And as the lovers of God are hateful to the world, so the world ought to be hateful to him who loves God. St. Paul said: *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me* (Gal. vi. 14). The Apostle was an odious thing to the world, as a man condemned and dead upon a cross is odious; and in return, the world was odious to St. Paul: *The world is crucified to me*.

Jesus Christ chose to die upon the Cross for our sins, for this end, that He might deliver us from this wicked world. Our Lord, having called us to His love, desires that we should become superior to the promises and threats of the world. He desires that we should no longer take account of its censures or its praise. We must pray God to make us utterly forget the world, and to rejoice when we see the world reject us. It is not enough, in order to belong wholly to God, that we should abandon the world; we must desire that the world should abandon us, and utterly condemn us. Some people leave the world, but they do not cease to wish to be praised by it, at least for having abandoned it. In such persons the desire of worldly estimation causes the world still to live in them.

II.

Thus, then, the world hates the servants of God, and hates their good example and holy maxims; and therefore it is neces-

sary that we should hate all the maxims of the world. *The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be* (Rom. viii. 7). The Apostle says *it cannot be*, for this reason, that the world has no other object but its own interest or pleasure; and thus it cannot agree with those who seek only to please God.

Yea, O Jesus, crucified and dead for me, Thee alone I desire to please. What is the world, what are riches, what are honours? I desire that Thou, my Redeemer, shouldst be all my Treasure; to love Thee is my riches. If Thou wilt have me poor, I desire to be poor; if Thou wilt have me humbled and despised by all, I embrace all and receive all from Thy hands. Thy will shall ever be my comforter. This is the grace that I seek of Thee, that in every event I may never depart an instant from Thy holy will.

Spiritual Reading

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

IX. -- MEANS OF ACQUIRING THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ ought to be our whole love. He is worthy of it, both because He is a God of infinite goodness, and because He has loved us to such an excess, that He died for us. Oh, what a great obligation we are under to Jesus Christ! All the good we enjoy, all our inspirations, calls, pardons, helps, hopes, consolations, sweetnesses, and loving affections, come to us through Jesus Christ. Let us see by what means we are to acquire this love of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, we must *desire* to have this love of Jesus Christ, and we must, therefore, often ask Him to give it to us, especially in our prayers, in our Communions, and in the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament. And this grace must also be sought through the hands of the ever-blessed Mary, from our Guardian Angel and our holy Patrons, that they may enable us to love Jesus Christ. St. Francis de Sales says that the grace of loving Jesus Christ contains all other graces in itself; because he who truly loves Jesus Christ cannot be wanting in any virtue.

In the second place, if we wish to acquire the love of Jesus Christ, we must detach our hearts from all earthly affections; Divine love will find no place in a heart that is full of this world.

St. Philip Neri used to say: "The love we give to creatures is all so much taken from God."

In the third place, we must often exercise ourselves, especially when we pray, in making acts of the love of Jesus Christ. Acts of love are the fuel with which we keep alive the fire of holy charity. Let us make acts of love and complacency, saying: "My Jesus, I rejoice that Thou art infinitely happy, and that Thy Eternal Father loves Thee as much as Himself." Of benevolence: "I wish, my Jesus, that all could know and love Thee." Of predilection, as: "My Jesus, I love Thee more than all things! I love Thee more than myself!" Let us also often make acts of contrition, which are called acts of sorrowful love.

In the fourth place, if any one wishes to make sure of being inflamed with love towards Jesus Christ, let him try to meditate often on His Passion. It was revealed to a holy solitary, that no exercise was more efficacious in enkindling love, than the consideration of the sufferings and ignominy which Jesus Christ endured for love of us. I say, it is impossible that a soul, meditating often on the Passion of Jesus Christ, should be able to resist His love. It was for this that, although He could have saved us by one drop of His Blood, nay even by a single prayer, He chose to suffer so much, and to shed all His Blood, that He might attract all hearts to love Him; therefore he who meditates on His Passion does what is very agreeable to Him. Do you, then, often make your Meditation on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do so at least every Friday, the day on which He died for the love of us. For this purpose I have written many Meditations on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially the *Darts of Fire*, which speak of the love Jesus Christ has borne us in the great work of our Redemption.

Evening Meditation

DIVINE LOVE VICTORIOUS OVER GOD HIMSELF

I.

Our God is omnipotent: who, then, will ever overcome and conquer Him? Love towards man has conquered and triumphed over Him, says St. Bernard. For His love has caused Him to die in torments upon a disgraceful Cross to secure man's salvation. O infinite Love! Unhappy the soul that loves Thee not!

What man, not a believer, passing by Calvary on that day when Jesus was dying on the Cross, and enquiring who was that *criminal*, crucified in such a mangled state, was told it was the Son of God, true God, equal with His Father, would not have said with the Gentiles that to believe such things was folly? "It appeared folly," says St. Gregory, "that the Author of life should die for men." If it would have appeared folly to suppose that a king would become a worm for the love of a worm, greater still would have appeared the folly of believing that God had become Man for the love of man, to die for man. This led St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to say, concerning this immense love of God, "My Jesus, Thou lovest us to madness."

And, alas! I, a miserable sinner, have not loved God, but have many times offended Him!

II.

Christian, lift up your eyes, and behold that afflicted one upon the Cross, oppressed with grief and torments, struggling in His agony, on the point of expiring, dying for the pure love of you. Know you who He is? He is your God. And if you believe that He is your God, ask who has reduced Him to such a miserable condition. "What has done this?" asks St. Bernard. He answers: "Love has done it, regardless of its own dignity." It was love, which refuses no pain, or disgrace, when it would make itself known and exert itself for its beloved.

O Jesus, it was because Thou didst so much love me, that Thou didst suffer so much for me: if Thou hadst loved me less Thou wouldst have suffered less. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, with my whole heart. And how can I refuse God my whole love, when He has not refused me His Precious Blood, His life? I love Thee, O Jesus, my Love, my All! Holy Mary, Virgin of virgins, help me by thy prayers faithfully to love Jesus.

Saturday after Septuagesima **Morning Meditation**

SOULS THAT LOVE GOD DESIRE TO GO TO SEE HIM IN HEAVEN.

The worldly-minded fear losing their earthly goods, fleeting and miserable things that they are, but the Saints only fear losing

God Who is a Good infinite and eternal. Wherefore death is an object of terror to souls attached to the earth, while it is specially desired by those who love God; for, says St. Bernard, it is the termination of labour and the gate of life. They cry out with St. Paul: *Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. vii. 24).

I.

While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord (2 Cor. v. 6). Souls who, in this life love God alone are like noble pilgrims, destined, according to their present state, to be the eternal brides of the King of Heaven, but now live far away without seeing Him; wherefore they do naught but sigh for their departure to the country of the Blessed, where they know that their Spouse awaits them.

They know, indeed, that their Beloved is ever present with them, but is, as it were, hidden by a veil, and does not show himself. Or, to speak more correctly, He is like the sun behind clouds, which from time to time, sends forth a ray of its splendour, but displays not itself fully. These beloved brides have a veil before their eyes, which prevents them from seeing Him Whom they love. They live, nevertheless, contented, uniting themselves to the Will of the Lord Who chooses to keep them in exile, and far away from Himself; but with all this, they cannot but continually sigh to see Him face to face, in order to be more inflamed with love towards Him.

Therefore, each one of them often sweetly complains to its beloved Spouse because He shows Himself not and says to Him: "O Thou only love of my heart, since Thou hast so loved me, and hast wounded me with Thy holy love, why hidest Thou Thyself, and allowest me not to see Thee? I know that Thou art infinite Beauty; I love Thee more than myself, though I have never yet beheld Thee. Open to me Thy beautiful countenance; I would know Thee all revealed, in order that I may no more look to myself nor to any creature, and may think only of loving Thee, my highest Good."

II.

When to souls thus enamoured of God there shines forth a ray of Divine goodness and of the love which God bears them, they would wish to be dissolved and melt away for desire of Him,

and though for them the sun is still concealed behind the clouds, and His fair face hidden, and their own eyes veiled, so that they cannot gaze on Him face to face; yet what shall be their joy when the clouds disperse, and the gates open, and the veil is taken from their eyes, and the fair countenance of their Beloved appears so that in the clear light of day they look upon His beauty, His goodness, His greatness, and the love He bears them!

O death, why dost thou so long delay to come? If thou comest not, I cannot depart to behold my God. It is thou that must open to me the gates, that I may enter into the palace of my Lord. O blessed country, when will the day come when I shall find myself within thy eternal tabernacles? O Beloved of my soul, my Jesus, my Treasure, my Love, my All! When will that happy moment come, when, leaving this earth, I shall see myself all united with Thee? I deserve not this happiness; but the love Thou hast shown me, and, still more, Thy infinite goodness makes me hope that I shall be one day joined to those happy souls, who, being wholly united with Thee, love Thee, and will love Thee with a perfect love through all eternity. O my Jesus, Thou seest the alternative in which I am placed, of being either united with Thee for ever, or for ever far from Thee! Have mercy upon me. Thy Blood is my hope; and thy intercession, O my Mother Mary, is my comfort and my joy. Amen.

Spiritual Reading

PREPARATION FOR DEATH

Some devout souls, with great spiritual profit to themselves, are accustomed to renew every month, after having been at Confession and Communion, the *Protestation for Death*, imagining themselves at the point of death and about to depart from this world. Unless you do this during life you will find it hard at death to embrace with resignation and love death and all its pains. In her last illness that great servant of God, Sister Catherine of St. Albert, of the Order of St. Teresa, sighed and said: "Sisters, I do not sigh through fear of death, for I have lived twenty-five years expecting it, but I sigh at the sight of so many Christians who spend their life in sin, leaving themselves only the hour of death to make their peace with God, when I can scarcely pronounce the Name of Jesus!"

EXERCISES FOR THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH

Preparation for a Happy Death

Under the Protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the Dying
Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph

1. O glorious St. Joseph, most pure Spouse of most holy Mary, even as the trouble and anguish of thy heart was great in the perplexity of abandoning thy most chaste and stainless Spouse; so, too, inexplicable was thy delight when the Angel revealed to thee the sovereign mystery of the Incarnation.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, we pray thee now, and in our last agony, to comfort our souls with the joy of a good life and of a holy death like unto thine between Jesus and Mary.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

2. O glorious St. Joseph, most blessed Patriarch, who wast selected for the office of reputed Father of the Word made Man; the grief which thou didst feel at seeing the Child Jesus born in such great poverty was suddenly changed for thee into heavenly exultation at hearing the angelic harmony, and seeing the glories of that most resplendent night.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, we beseech thee to obtain for us that, after the journey of this life is over, we may pass hence to hear the angelic praises, and to enjoy the splendours of the glory of Heaven.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

3. O glorious St. Joseph, who didst fulfil most obediently all God's commands, the most Precious Blood which the Child Redeemer shed in the Circumcision struck death into thy heart, but the Name of Jesus revived it, and filled it full of joy.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that, all vices having been taken from us during life, we may expire in exultation with the Most Holy Name of Jesus in our hearts and upon our lips.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

4. O glorious St. Joseph, most faithful Saint, who wast a partaker in the Mysteries of our Redemption, if Simeon's prophecy or that which Jesus and Mary were to suffer caused thee a

mortal pang, it filled thee also with a blessed joy at the salvation and glorious resurrection of innumerable souls, which he at the same time foretold would thence proceed.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that we may be of the number of those who, through the merits of Jesus, and at the intercession of the Virgin Mother, are to rise again in glory.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

5. O glorious St. Joseph, most watchful guardian and familiar attendant of the Incarnate Son of God, how much didst thou suffer in supporting and in serving the Son of the Most High, particularly in the flight which thou hadst to make into Egypt; but how much again didst thou rejoice at having always with thee that same God, and at seeing the idols of Egypt fall to the ground!

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that, by keeping far from us hell's tyrant, especially by flying from dangerous occasions, every idol of earthly affection may fall from our hearts; and that, wholly occupied in the service of Jesus and of Mary, we may live for them alone, and die a happy death.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

6. O glorious St. Joseph, Angel of the earth, who didst marvel at beholding the King of Heaven subject to thy commands, if thy consolation at bringing Him back from Egypt was disturbed by the fear of Archelaus, yet when assured by the Angel, thou didst dwell in joy with Jesus and Mary at Nazareth.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that our hearts, unclouded by hurtful fears, may enjoy peace of conscience, and that we may live secure with Jesus and Mary, and with them may also die.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

7. O glorious St. Joseph, model of all holiness, when without fault of thine thou hadst lost the Child Jesus, thou didst seek Him for three days in the greatest sorrow, until with joyful heart thou didst possess again thy Life, finding Him in the Temple among the doctors.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, with fervent sighs we supplicate thee to interpose in our behalf, that so it may never

be fall us to lose Jesus by mortal sin; but that, if unhappily we ever lose Him, we may seek Him again with unwearied sorrow, until once more we find His favour, especially at the moment of our death, so that we may pass to the enjoyment of Him in Heaven, and there with thee sing His Divine mercies for all eternity.

"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and "Glory be to the Father."

Antiph. Jesus Himself was beginning about His thirtieth year, being (as it was supposed) the Son of Joseph.

V. Pray for us, O holy Joseph.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, who by Thy ineffable Providence didst vouchsafe to choose the Blessed Joseph for the Spouse of Thy most holy Mother; grant, we beseech Thee, that he whom we venerate as our protector on earth may be our intercessor in Heaven. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe out my soul in peace with you.

After which is said the following.

PRAYER FOR A HAPPY DEATH

O Lord Jesus, God of goodness and Father of mercies, I approach to Thee with a contrite and humble heart; to Thee I recommend my last hour, and that which then awaits me.

When my feet, now motionless, shall admonish me that my mortal course is drawing to an end;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my hands, trembling and benumbed, no longer able to hold Thy crucified Image, shall let it fall from their feeble grasp upon my bed of pain;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my eyes, dim and troubled at the horror of approaching death, shall fix on Thee their languid and expiring looks;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my lips, cold and trembling, shall pronounce for the last time Thy adorable Name;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my cheeks, pale and livid, shall inspire the beholders with pity and dismay; and my hair, bathed in the sweat of death, and stiffening on my head, shall forbode my approaching end;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my ears, soon to be for ever shut to the discourse of men, shall open to hear Thy voice pronounce the irrevocable decree which shall decide my lot for eternity;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my imagination, agitated by horrid and terrifying phantoms, shall be sunk in mortal anguish; when my soul, affrighted at the sight of my iniquities and the terrors of Thy judgments, shall have to fight against the angel of darkness, who will endeavour to conceal Thy mercies from my eyes, and plunge me into despair;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my poor heart, oppressed with the pains of sickness, and exhausted by its struggles against the enemies of its salvation, shall be seized with the pangs of death;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When the last tears, forerunners of my dissolution, shall drop from my eyes, receive them as a sacrifice of expiation for my sins, that I may die the victim of penance; and in that dreadful moment,

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my friends and relations, encircling my bed, shall shed the tear of pity over me, and invoke Thy clemency in my behalf;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When I shall have lost the use of my senses, and the world shall have vanished from my sight; when I shall groan with anguish in my last agony and in the sorrows of death;

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my last sighs shall summon my soul to go forth from my body, receive them as the effects of a holy impatience to fly to Thee; and; in that moment,

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When my soul, trembling on my lips, shall bid adieu to the world, and leave my body lifeless, pale and cold, receive this sep-

aration as a homage, which I shall willingly pay to Thy Divine Majesty; and in that last moment of my mortal life,

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

When at length my soul, admitted to Thy Presence, shall first behold with terror Thy awful Majesty, reject me not, but receive me into Thy bosom, where I may for ever sing Thy praises; and in that moment when eternity shall begin to me,

R. Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me.

Let us pray.

O God Who hast doomed all men to die, but hast concealed from all the hour of their death; grant that I may pass my days in the practice of holiness and justice, and that I may deserve to quit this world in Thy holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

After the Hymn, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed, and *O Salutaris* sung. Then follows-

THE PROTESTATION FOR DEATH

My God, prostrate in Thy Presence, I adore Thee; and I intend to make the following protestation, as if I were on the point of passing from this life into eternity.

My Lord, because Thou art the Infallible Truth, and hast revealed it to the Holy Church, I believe in the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three Persons, but only one God; Who for all eternity rewards the just in Heaven, and punishes the wicked in hell. I believe that the Second Person, that is, the Son of God, became Man, and died for the salvation of mankind; and I believe all that the Holy Church believes. I thank Thee for having made me a Christian, and I protest that I will live and die in this holy Faith.

My God, my Hope, trusting in Thy promises, I hope from Thy mercy, not through my own merits, but through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, perseverance, and, after this miserable life, the glory of Paradise. And should the devil at death tempt me to despair at the sight of my sins, I protest that I will always hope in Thee, O Lord, and that I desire to die in the loving arms of Thy goodness.

O God, worthy of infinite love, I love Thee with my whole heart more than I love myself; and I protest that I desire to die

making an act of love, that I may thus continue to love Thee eternally in Heaven, which for this end I desire and ask of Thee. And if hitherto, O Lord, instead of loving Thee, I have despised Thy infinite goodness, I repent of it with all my heart, and I protest that I wish to die, always weeping over and detesting the offences I have committed against Thee. I purpose for the future rather to die than ever to sin again; and for the love of Thee I pardon all who have offended me.

O God, I accept of death, and of all the sufferings which will accompany it; I unite it with the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and offer it in acknowledgment of Thy supreme dominion, and in satisfaction for my sins. Do Thou, O Lord, accept of this sacrifice which I make of my life, for the love of that great Sacrifice which Thy Divine Son made of Himself upon the Altar of the Cross. I resign myself entirely to Thy Divine will, as though I were now on my deathbed, and protest that I wish to die, saying, *O Lord, always Thy will be done.*

Most holy Virgin, my Advocate and my Mother, Mary, thou art and wilt always be, after God, my hope and my consolation at the hour of death. From this moment I have recourse to thee, and beg of thee to assist me in that passage. O my dear Queen, do not abandon me in that last moment; come then to take my soul and present it to thy Son. Henceforward, I shall expect thee; and I hope to die under thy mantle and clinging to thy feet. My Protector St. Joseph, St. Michael Archangel, my Angel Guardian, my holy Patrons, do you all assist me in that last combat with hell.

And Thou, my Crucified Love, Thou, my Jesus Who wert pleased to choose for Thyself so bitter a death, to obtain for me a good death, remember at that hour that I am one of those dear sheep Thou didst purchase with Thy Blood. Thou who, when all the world shall have forsaken me and not one shall be able to assist me, canst alone console me and save me, do Thou make me worthy then to receive Thee in the Viaticum, and suffer me not to lose Thee for ever, and to be banished for ever to a distance from Thee, No, my beloved Saviour, receive me then into Thy sacred Wounds, for I now embrace Thee. At my last breath I intend to breathe forth my soul into the loving Wound in Thy

Side, saying now for that moment: *Jesus and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul.*

R. Jesus and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul. O happy suffering, to suffer for God! Happy death, to die in the Lord!

I embrace Thee now, my good Redeemer, that I may die in Thy embraces. If, O my soul, Mary assists you at your departure, and Jesus receives your last breath, It will not be death, but a sweet repose.

Then follows the *Tantum Ergo*, etc.

Evening Meditation

MARY RENDERS DEATH SWEET TO HER CLIENTS.

I.

He that is a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is proved in distress (Prov. xvii. 17).

We can never know our friends and relatives in the days of prosperity: it is only in the time of adversity that we see them in their true colours. People of the world never abandon a person in prosperity; but should misfortune overtake him, and particularly if death be at hand, they immediately forsake him. The Blessed Virgin does not act thus with her clients. In all their afflictions, and more particularly in the sorrows of death, the greatest that can be endured in this world, this good Lady and Mother not only does not abandon her faithful servants, but as during our exile on earth she is *our life*, so at our last hour she is *our sweetness*, by obtaining for us a peaceful, happy death. For from the day on which Mary had the privilege and the sorrow of assisting at the death of Jesus her Son Who was the Head of all the predestined, it has become her privilege to assist also at their deaths. And for this reason the Holy Church teaches us to beg this most Blessed Virgin to assist us especially at the moment of our death. *Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.*

O how great are the sufferings of the dying! They suffer from remorse of conscience on account of past sins; from the fear of the approaching Judgment and from the uncertainty of salvation. Then it is that hell arms itself and spares no effort to gain the soul on the point of entering into eternity, for the devils know that only a short time remains in which to gain it, and that if they lose it then they lose it for ever. *The devil is come down unto*

you having great wrath knowing that he hath but a short time (Apoc. xii. 12).

Oh, how quickly do the rebellious spirits fly from the presence of this great Queen! At the hour of death if only we have the protection of Mary what need we fear from all our infernal enemies? O you are indeed fortunate if at death you are bound in the sweet chains of the love of the Mother of God! These chains are chains of salvation.

O my most sweet Mother, how shall I die, poor sinner that I am? Even now the thought of that supreme moment in which I must expire and appear before the Judgment seat of God, and the remembrance of having myself so often written my condemnation by consenting to sin, makes me tremble. I am confounded and fear much for my salvation. O Mary, in the Blood of Jesus and in thy intercession is all my hope.

II.

A great lover of Mary said before expiring: "O my Father, would that you could know the happiness I now enjoy from having served the most holy Mother of God! I cannot tell you the joy I now experience!" Father Suarez in consequence of his devotion to Mary died with such peace and joy that he said: "I could not have thought that death was so sweet!" You will, without doubt, experience the same joy and contentment in death if you can then remember that you have loved this good Mother who cannot be otherwise than faithful to her children who were faithful in serving and honouring her by their Visits, Rosaries, Fasts, and still more by frequently thanking and praising her and often recommending themselves to her powerful protection.

Nor will this consolation be withheld even if you have been for a time a sinner, provided that from this day you are careful to live well and to serve this most gracious and benign Lady. Though you may have hitherto offended God she will procure you a sweet and happy death. And if at that moment you are greatly alarmed and lose confidence at the sight of your sins, she will come and encourage you as she has so many others. Let us, then, be of good heart though we be sinners; and let us feel assured that Mary will come and assist us at death, and by her presence comfort and console us, provided only that we serve

her lovingly during the remainder of our life. Our Queen, addressing St. Matilda one day, promised to assist all her clients at death who, during life, had faithfully served her. "I a most tender Mother," said Mary, "will faithfully be present at the death of all who piously serve me and will console and protect them." O God, what a consolation will it be at that last moment of our lives, when our eternal lot has to be decided, to see the Queen of Heaven assisting and consoling us with the assurance of her protection!

O Consoler of the afflicted, console a poor creature who recommends himself to thee! The remorse of a burdened conscience fills me with affliction. I know not if I have sufficiently grieved for my sins. All my actions are imperfect and sullied. Hell awaits my death in order to accuse me: the outraged justice of God demands satisfaction. My Mother, what will become of me? If thou dost not help me I am lost. Wilt thou not succour me? O compassionate Virgin, console me! Obtain me true sorrow for my sins, and the strength to amend my life and be faithful to God during the rest of my days. When I am in the last agonies of death, O Mary, my hope, do not abandon me. Then, more than ever, help and encourage me that I may not despair at the sight of my sins which the devil will then place before my eyes. O my Queen, pardon my temerity and come thyself to console me by thy presence. Thou hast conferred this grace upon so many others, do not refuse it to me. If my boldness is great, greater still is thy goodness, for it seeks out the most miserable in order to console them. It is this that gives me confidence. For thy eternal glory, be it said that thou hast snatched an unhappy creature from hell to which he was already condemned and hast led him into thy kingdom. O yes, sweet Mother, I hope to have the happiness of remaining always at thy feet in Heaven, thanking and blessing and loving thee for ever! O Mary, I shall expect thee at my last hour. Deprive me not of this consolation. So may it be! Amen. Amen.

In many churches the devout Exercises for a Happy Death are performed once a month, and with great and lasting profit to innumerable souls. A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by all the faithful who assist. These Exercises can be performed

privately by each in his or her own home, and, as St. Alphonsus suggests, it would be well for all to do so at least *once a month*. The following is the usual order of the devout Exercises publicly or privately performed.

1. The Rosary of the Blessed Virgin is recited, or the Seven Joys and Sorrows of St. Joseph.

2. Then the Sermon, or a *Reading*, or a *Meditation* on Death. See Vol I. Part 1. pp. 23, 70, 270. 274, 370. etc.; Part II, pp. 1, 16, 19, 26, 31, 34, 61, 68, 73. 87, 126, 163.

3. Then the Prayer for a Happy Death, p. 381, after which a suitable hymn is sung -- *e.g. God of Mercy and Compassion*, or a hymn to St. Joseph, patron of a happy death.

4. The Blessed Sacrament is then exposed for Benediction as usual, and after the *O Salutaris Hostia* the *Protestation for Death* is recited, p. 383. Then the *Tantum Ergo*, etc.

Plenary Indulgence, on the usual conditions, to all who on the fourth Sunday of the month assist at this devout Exercise in any Church of the Redemptorist Fathers. The prayers, "Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph," do not essentially belong to the Preparation for Death, and may therefore be omitted. They were composed by the Ven. Father Januarius Sarnelli, C.SS.R. (one of the first companions of St. Alphonsus), who in the year 1744 died at Naples in the odour of sanctity.