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# Daily Meditations

## DAILY MEDITATIONS





# *Daily Meditations*

*Compiled From the Writings of the*

VERY REV. BASIL ANTHONY MOREAU, C.S.C.

*Supplemented by Materials in Accordance*

*With His Spirit Drawn From*

*Various Other Sources*

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CHARLES J. CORCORAN, C.S.C.  
*Censor deputatus*

IMPRIMATUR:

✠ LEO A. PURSLEY, D.D.  
*Bishop of Fort Wayne*

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## Introductory Note

The following meditations are based on the writings of the Very Reverend Basil Anthony Moreau, Founder of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, supplemented by materials in accordance with his spirit borrowed from various other sources.

The sources for the materials taken from Father Moreau were mainly his *Méditations Chrétiennes* in the Montreal reprint of the definitive edition (1872) and his *Méditations à l'usage des Marianites* (Le Mans, 1855). The unpublished translation of the former work, prepared by the late Mother M. Eleanore, C.S.C., and the more recent English version made by Sister Mary Madonna, C.S.C., greatly assisted this compilation. Father Moreau's circular letters, translated by the Reverend Edward L. Heston, C.S.C. (2 vols., Notre Dame, Indiana, 1944), and his available conferences were also utilized. The latter materials were selected from still unpublished and untranslated conferences or sermons and also from the collection published in the English translation of Mother M. Eleanore under the title *Our Light and Our Way* (Milwaukee, 1936).

The relatively limited materials provided by the circular letters and conferences of Father Moreau which were available to the compiler, together with his ordinary practice of giving only three meditations for each week in his *Méditations Chrétiennes* and chiefly meditations for Sundays and principal feasts only in his *Méditations à l'usage des Marianites*, made it necessary to add supplementary materials. The choice of these was guided by suggestions inferred from

Father Moreau's own writings, notably his strong exhortations to the detailed study of the Gospel. Materials were borrowed from sources too numerous to list here, but special indebtedness should be mentioned with reference to the three-volume work of the Reverend Maurice Meschler, S.J., which was used in the French edition, entitled *Méditations sur la Vie de Notre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Paris, 1892).\* The supplementary sources not only contributed needed additional meditations, but in a large number of meditations these materials are closely intermingled with those taken from Father Moreau. So pervasive and integral is the blending in these cases that, although admittedly desirable, it seemed impractical—or nearly impossible—to distinguish typographically or by some alternative the portions contributed by Father Moreau.

The arrangement of the book is according to the months of the calendar year, grouped in approximate concurrence with the ecclesiastical seasons. Meditations for the fixed feasts are presented on their proper dates, but the meditations for movable feasts and those specifically pertinent to variable ecclesiastical seasons had to be assigned to definite dates, which will only occasionally coincide with the actual occurrence of these special days. For example, the Advent series begins with December 1, the meditation for the first Sunday of Lent is assigned to March 1, and the Easter meditation to April 12. The Easter series closes with the feast of Pentecost, which is assigned to May 31.

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\* Apparently a source also for the author of *Meditation on the Passion* (Westminster, Md., 1947), edited by the Reverend Reginald Walsh, O.P. This work was in no way utilized for the present compilation. Similarity between certain meditations in the present book and the just-mentioned work edited by Father Walsh is undoubtedly to be explained by the independent use in both of Father Meschler's volumes.

Meditations for fixed feasts whose subject is not appropriate to the immediate sequence in which they fall are mentioned under the proper date by title only, and a page reference is given to the *Festivals and Saints* section for the meditation itself. With the exception of the meditation for the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, and that for the feast of St. Anne, July 26, both of which are noted at their proper dates in the regular series with the usual reference to the *Festivals and Saints* section, all meditations on the saints are additional. The saints chosen are, with two exceptions (St. Anne and St. Patrick), among those included by Father Moreau in the section headed "Propre des Saints" in *Méditations Chrétiennes*. Particular interest attaches to the selection of St. Basil the Great, whose name Father Moreau received in Baptism, St. Vincent de Paul, devotion to whom was particularly recommended to Father Moreau by his director, Abbé Mollevaut, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, whom Father Moreau urged his community to adopt as a special patron and model.

Quotations from the Old Testament follow the Confraternity revision of the Challoner-Rheims version, except for those Books of the Old Testament which have so far been published in the new Confraternity edition, namely, Genesis to Ruth and the Sapiential Books.\* The Confraternity edition was also used for New Testament quotations, except in rare instances where the readings given in the Westminster version of the New Testament showed important differences favored by the most recent scholarship. The sequence of events in the life of our Lord is that adopted by the Reverend

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\* An exception is made in a few instances when the older reading is important for the meditation.

Stephen J. Hartdegen, O.F.M., S.Scr.L., in *A Chronological Harmony of the Gospels* (Paterson, N. J., 1942).

The compiler wishes to acknowledge here a very great debt of gratitude to Mother M. Rose Elizabeth, who during her terms of office as superior general of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, initiated the work of these meditations and aided their progress by her constant interest and kind encouragement, and also to Mother Kathryn Marie, the present superior-general of the Congregation, for her patience and understanding during the final stages of revision. Grateful acknowledgment should also be made to Sister M. Verda Clare, C.S.C., and Sister Gabrielle Marie, C.S.C., for careful reading and helpful criticism of the first drafts and to the Reverend Charles J. Corcoran, C.S.C., who examined the finished manuscript, for his invaluable assistance. The final revision of the meditations was greatly benefited by his suggestions. Appreciation and gratitude are also due the many Sisters of the Holy Cross who were a strong and reliable source of help throughout all stages of the work by their prayers, suggestions, and kind expressions of interest and encouragement.

SISTER M. MONICA, C.S.C.

DECEMBER — JANUARY — FEBRUARY

ADVENT TO LENT



*The Season of Advent*



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“To you I lift up my soul, O Lord, my God. In you I trust; let me not be put to shame” (from the Introit of the Mass for the first Sunday of Advent).

At the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, the Church reiterates her confidence in Jesus, who will inevitably come to reward those who long for Him and prepare for His coming.

O Jesus, help me to prepare my soul for Your coming by deeper recollection, more fervent prayer, and greater mortification.

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At the opening of the Advent season the Church invites us to prepare ourselves for the anniversary of the first coming, humble and hidden, of her divine Bridegroom; and with this thought she unites that of His second coming in all the terrors of the last judgment. But why does the Church ask us to commemorate a preparation time of days gone by and to renew the long vigil of ancient hopes and yearnings? Why does she return to the holy darkness that surrounded the prophets and veil herself in her liturgy with their ancient visions? It is in order that the wonder and sweetness of their present blessings may be all the more relished by her children. We stand as if in the majestic porch of a medieval cathedral, where we see portrayed our first parents and the forbidden tree and the figures of the patriarchs and prophets. Then, the liturgy of the Advent season leads us gradually down the holy dimness of the nave to the sanctuary and the tabernacle where our Savior dwells among us, no longer in figure, but in living reality.

We prepare, indeed, for three advents which are intimately connected, each depending closely upon the others. Christmas not only commemorates the earthly nativity of our Savior, but the graces attached to the Christmas feast dispose us for the spiritual birth of Jesus in our hearts, and also prepare us for His coming at the last judgment. Our dispositions, therefore, should be, like those of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, dispositions of interior and exterior penance, recollection, and prayer. Exterior penance means bodily self-denial. Interior penance consists in repenting of our past faults and firmly resolving not to commit them again. It implies also the struggle against our pettiness, touchiness, and foolish sensibility. Let us acknowledge by our spirit of penance that too often, like the Jews, we have not comprehended the Light that has burst upon our darkness; and that by us also Jesus has been despised and unknown at the very time He came to us.

The other forms of Advent preparation, namely, recollection and prayer, are urged upon us not only by the increased intensity of the Church's supplications in her liturgy, but also by everything around us. Nature herself appears to be wrapped in silence and recollection during this season. There are few outward signs of life in her except in the heavens where the bright winter stars draw our gaze and our thoughts toward heaven and eternity. Advent should be for us like the holy day of repose before a feast. Our prayers during this time should be centered in petitions for the interests of the Church, the conversion of sinners, and the accomplishment of all the designs of God in ordaining the celebration of this holy season.

“The Savior of the world shall rise like the sun; and shall come down into the womb of the Virgin as the shower of rain upon the grass. Alleluia.



“O God who gladdens us by the annual expectation of our redemption, grant that we who joyfully receive Your only-begotten Son as a Redeemer, may safely behold Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, coming as a judge” (Antiphon and Prayer from Lauds of Christmas Eve).

DECEMBER 2

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## *The Second Coming of Our Savior*



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“And then they will see the Son of Man coming upon a cloud with great power and majesty” (Lk. 21:27).

The second coming of the Son of Man will be sudden and swift as lightning; and when He appears all the living and dead will be gathered before the throne of His majesty.

I cry to You, O God, with the penitent David, *Sustain me as you have promised, that I may live; disappoint me not in my hope.*

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When the last trumpet will have sounded, the cry of command will go out to the ends of the earth, “*Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee.*” Instantly, all the dead will arise and *in the twinkling of an eye* they will be gathered in the Valley of Josaphat. All men will arise, but all will not then present the same appearance. The elect will leave their tombs, spiritualized, beautiful, endowed with brilliance and agility. The damned will emerge showing even in their bodies their eternal confirmation in evil. Then, Jesus Christ will appear as Judge. He will come, as He tells us, *with great power and majesty* on the clouds of heaven, accompanied by His

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angels, who are to be the witnesses and executors of His sentence. On earth Jesus chose poverty, humility, and abnegation, but at the last judgment we shall see Him upon the throne of His glory, revealed in all His tremendous majesty. The elect will contemplate Him with joy and rapture as their Redeemer; the reprobate will see Him only as their Judge, and in terror they will cry to the mountains, "*Fall upon us,*" and to the hills, "*Cover us.*"

The judgment itself will consist, first, of the manifestation of consciences. By an act of divine omnipotence, suddenly and instantaneously, all consciences will be revealed with an indescribable clarity, as in a luminous tableau. The whole history of the Church, of the world, of all humanity, will be simultaneously seen, together with the details of the conduct of states and nations and of all human societies. Secret thoughts, plans, and intentions will be disclosed, and in all we shall see revealed at last the marvelous counsels and ways of Providence. The justice, the wisdom, the power and goodness of God will be everywhere made manifest. In this great light, individuals and peoples will read their own sentence, but the second act of judgment will be the formal pronouncement of this sentence. Our Savior will first address the elect; and His gaze full of love will be itself very heaven for them. "*Come, blessed of my Father,*" He will say, "*take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" O sweet words! Shall we deserve to hear them? Then, turning toward the lost His glance of eternal wrath, He will pronounce their doom: "*Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.*" O fatal day for the reprobate! The seal of eternity is on their sentence. Lastly, the sentence will be executed. The abyss will

open to engulf the demons and the unhappy souls of the damned. But for the elect the eternal *Alleluia* is now to begin — eternal beatitude, gladness without end, the everlasting wedding feast of the Lamb.

Jesus, my Redeemer, help me to expiate my sins now, in *the acceptable time*, and grant me that spirit of charity and zeal which will prompt me to make acts of self-denial and to pray daily for the salvation of all sinners. "Righteous Judge, for sin's pollution, grant Your gift of absolution, ere that day of retribution."

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DECEMBER 3

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### *Christian Vigilance*



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"And what I say to you, I say to all, 'Watch'" (Mk. 13:37).

To the prediction of His second coming Jesus added an emphatic admonition that we should prepare for it by vigilance, prayer, and good works.

O my Savior, grant me the grace to live daily in a state of Christian preparedness.

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In concluding His prediction of the last judgment and the signs that were to precede it, Jesus counseled His hearers and us to watch (literally, "to keep awake") and pray, to hold ourselves in readiness and to be diligent in good works. This preparation is necessary, our Savior tells us, because, while the Lord's coming is certain, the hour of His coming is uncertain, and because each of us will receive a recompense according to his works. Moreover, Jesus repeated these warn-

ings in the comparisons and images of three parables. The parable of the porter who is charged by his master as he leaves for a journey to keep watch at the door is a counsel of vigilance. The parable of the ten virgins warns us to keep ourselves in readiness. The parable of the talents exhorts us to zeal in good works. In these three parables our Savior is really giving us a complete instruction on preparation for death, which is actually for each one of us the coming of the Lord. What is said of the last judgment can be applied to the hour of our own death. This is why Jesus said, "*And what I say to you I say to all, 'Watch'*"; for the coming of the Lord for each of us is as certain as death is certain.

Should we not, then, think often of that supreme moment and make good use of the time granted us? Should not the whole concern of our life be to make that last moment our happiest one on earth? Nothing we do, whether good or evil, escapes the eye of our divine Master; and, because of the greatness of His majesty, a supreme degree of excellence can attach to our good works and a corresponding degree of malice to the evil we commit against Him. The necessity for daily vigilance in doing good and avoiding evil surely cannot be exaggerated where the judgment of God and our eternal lot are in question. If we knew that our Lord would come in such or such a number of years, we should regard it as the greatest folly not to spend our time in preparation for the all-important moment of His coming. But we know not the year, nor the day, nor the hour. Let us, then, examine our lives seriously, especially in view of the works of our vocation and our use of the graces attached to them. Let us, above all, continue to labor courageously in all earnestness and vigilance. If the work seems difficult, it will last only a short time, but its reward will last forever.

Soon the time will come when there will be no work to fear nor reward to strive for. Then may the recompense be ours — the reward prepared for the just, which is so unutterably magnificent that we could never work hard enough to deserve it.

O my divine Savior, You would not have warned me in advance if You had wished to destroy me unaware. Enliven my faith, vigilance, and love. Take from me this languor of soul which could cause my ruin. Help me to atone for the past and to sanctify the future, that I may await Your coming with confidence, that I may prepare myself by charity, that I may appear before You without fear.

DECEMBER 4

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*“Putting On” the Lord Jesus Christ*



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“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14).

We have *put on* the Lord Jesus Christ when the likeness of Christ becomes apparent in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Good Jesus, clothe me with the new man, as my holy vocation requires.

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The expression, *put on*, used by St. Paul, suggests the thought that we, on our part, should not receive passively the divine grace which will enable us to produce acts of virtue, but that we must co-operate with it. We must *put on* the garment of grace both in our exterior actions and our interior dispositions, so that the good works we do may proceed from our whole will and from the bottom of our hearts.

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What we cannot do in actual deed, we should accomplish at least by good will and heartfelt intention. St. John Chrysostom says in commenting upon this text of St. Paul, "To put on Christ is to make known the likeness of Christ on every side by holiness and meekness. Men appear outwardly according to the character of their clothing. Thus, Christ shall appear in us if we put on the clothing, that is, the likeness, of Christ." As clothing covers the whole body, so must the virtues of Christ manifest themselves in our actions, that in all our words and deeds Christ may be made known. The virtues of our divine Savior, His charity, obedience, humility, and chastity, should be, as it were, the garment of our souls. And when, by the grace of God, the virtues of Jesus will be our virtues, and His thoughts our thoughts, then we shall have become other Christs and His life will be truly manifested in our own.

The Savior of mankind who is about to come is Himself, therefore, the clothing which fallen man is to put on over his spiritual nakedness. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, hid themselves in shame because they were naked; but our good God condescended to cover our shame, that is, the misery of fallen human nature, with the robe of His divinity. We, on our part, should destroy in ourselves all affection for the sins that the Savior comes to cover with His infinite merits. St. Paul warns us of the necessity of this preparation, saying, "*Brethren . . . it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep.*" Our souls, although regenerated by Baptism and divinized by sanctifying grace can, without losing the state of grace and without being dead, yet sleep in tepidity under the accumulated covering of venial sins. The awakening to which St. Paul exhorts us signifies not only conversion from a life of sin to a life of virtue, but also every step upward

from a lower to a higher grade of perfection; it represents the response to all divine invitations to abandon still more completely *the ways of darkness* and to don more fully *the armor of light*. Life in his father's house was "darkness" to St. Francis of Assisi in comparison with the life of poverty and holiness which he spent in the daylight of God's grace. Let us open our eyes gladly to the light God sends us and listen eagerly for His divine call. *Oh, that today you would hear his voice: "Harden not your hearts."*

Lord Jesus, clothe me here below with the bright garment of Your grace, so that I may receive from You in heaven the robe of glory. Come and be born within me, that when You come to judge, I may look up and lift up my head with confidence, even in the presence of Your dread majesty, because I shall have You in my heart.

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DECEMBER 5

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### *The Eternal Decree of the Incarnation*



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"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For in him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers" (Col. 1:15, 16).

All that the communications of the goodness of God have effected in time, in the order of nature, grace, and glory, was decreed from all eternity, even that highest and most perfect of these communications, namely, the union of the human with the divine nature in the Person of the Word made flesh.

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O my God, fill me with the gratitude that is born of a deeper understanding of Your merciful decree of the Incarnation.

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The eternal decree of the Incarnation ordained that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity should contract in time a substantial union with a determined human nature; or rather, that He should elevate this nature to Himself in the unity of a Person. The Second Person of the Trinity, not the First nor the Third, was thus to be clothed with human nature. The Second Person is the Word, or Wisdom, the total expression of the Wisdom of the Father. Wisdom created the world; it was fitting that Wisdom restore it and establish it in its perfection. *All things were made through him* (that is, the Word), *and without him was made nothing that has been made.* The nature with which the Son of God should clothe Himself could be chosen properly only from among creatures endowed with reason, that is, from either angels or men. How important that choice was for us and how infinitely precious its consequences!

There was presented to the divine Will the angelic nature with its superiority, its purity, its nearness to God; and there was also human nature with all its limitations and lowliness. By clothing Himself with the angelic nature God would have rewarded and glorified by this honor the angels who had remained faithful to Him. On the other hand, in choosing human nature, God could, through this greater abasement, descend nearer to His creature and so attract and draw it more closely to Himself. Besides, since human nature comprised matter and spirit and thus united in itself the two great realms of creation, namely, the material and the spiritual, all creation would be raised by it even to God Himself. Divine pity also inspired the choice that was made, pity for



the fall of man whom a rebel angel had lured to his ruin. And so the Son of God in His mercy and goodness chose our nature. He chose to be with the children of men, for, as St. Paul says, *it is not angels that he is succoring, but he is succoring the offspring of Abraham.*

The God-Man was the first created being whom God knew and willed to bring into existence. As the end and goal of all creation, He is the first of all created beings. Even the material creation had in Him its end and aim. Our earth was to be the place of His habitation. For Him, therefore, were created the continents with their mountains and valleys; for Him precious metals and gems were hidden in the earth. For Him the streams and rivers were made to flow and unite in the seas. The earth was peopled with animals and plants for Him. In Him and by Him the wheat and wine and oil were created that were to bring to our earth its most precious blessings. Divine Wisdom formed all things in view of the destiny of the God-Man and His kingdom that was to come. -

Most Holy Trinity, I adore You and thank You for the glory You received through the decree of the Incarnation. I thank You in union with the Savior whom this decree endowed with all His perfections and excellence. I thank You on behalf of all mankind whose temporal and eternal destinies this decree so intimately concerned.

*The Eternal Choice of Mary*



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"From the mouth of the Most High I came forth, and mistlike covered the earth. In the highest heavens did I dwell, my throne on a pillar of cloud" (Ecclus. 24:3-4).

The proximate preparation for the coming of the Redeemer was, first, the eternal decree of God choosing her who was to be His Mother. After Jesus, Mary was first in the choice of God, not in the order of time, but under the aspect of dignity and elevation. From all eternity she had been divinely predestined not only to grace and glory, but also to her dignity as Mother of God.

O Mary, lead me, through meditation upon your greatness, to a better knowledge of the power and goodness of God.

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The decree of the eternal predestination of Jesus included not only the Incarnation itself, but also all the circumstances of time and place in which it would be realized. Chief among these circumstances was the one expressed by the Nicene Creed in the words, *Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto, ex Maria Virgine*. This is why the Church applies to Mary those passages of the Holy Scripture in which there is question of the life of the God-Man in eternity and of His work as Son of God and Eternal Wisdom. The words of the Book of Proverbs spoken by Wisdom are therefore truly applicable to Mary: "*The Lord begot me, the first born of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; from of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. . . . When he established the heavens I was there . . . then was*

*I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while."* How sweet it is to contemplate the Mother of God in the divine Mind, to see her enveloped, as it were, in the glories of the divine prevision of Jesus! As no human person more beautiful, more pure, more holy than Mary ever charmed the earth, so the thought and prevision of her who was to give Jesus to the world produced eternal delight in the Mind of the Creator. The beauty of Mary's life here below, the glory of her life in heaven, are only the reflection of her magnificence in God's creative thought. No mind but the Mind of God — and perhaps Mary herself — can comprehend fully her plenitude of innocence and holiness, her unimaginable greatness.

As the Old Testament was a preparation and prefiguring of Jesus, so also was it of Mary. Through the prophecies made of her coming, Mary, like our Savior, became an object of faith for the Chosen People. Numerous figures also proclaimed in advance her virtues, the graces wherewith she would be enriched, and her mission for the new Chosen People of God. The bush that *was on fire and was not burnt*, Gedeon's fleece which was found filled with dew, although the ground about it was dry, and the blossoming rod of Aaron, foreshadowed the Immaculate Conception. The seven-branched candlestick prefigured Mary's treasures of grace, and the Ark of the Covenant symbolized her priestly mission, for it was through Mary that God really allied Himself with His people. And what brilliant figures of our Lady are to be found among the heroines of Israel! Eve, Sara, Judith, Esther showed forth her virtues and the role she was to play in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The line of kings, priests, and prophets that, like a luxuriant

vine, runs through the history of Israel was but leading up to Mary, in whom the magnificent preparation for the Messiah reached its climax and its final perfection.

“O Mary, illustrious Virgin . . . you are a treasure among all women, you who even before the beginning of time had been chosen as the Mother of God. The patriarchs desired your birth, O Mary, the prophets announced you, just men and kings bore witness to you, the people of Israel sighed for you, until the day when at last you appeared, O Mary, for the salvation of a dying world. . . . You, who know how to give to the weak, strength, to the captive, freedom, be for me all-merciful, be by your love a mother to me” (Thomas à Kempis).

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DECEMBER 7

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### *The Betrothal of Mary and Joseph*



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“The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David” (Lk. 1:26, 27).

The betrothal of our Lady and St. Joseph was the last external preparation for our Savior’s birth. Betrothal among the Jews established a legal bond that was much closer than with us. The engagement thus contracted was hardly less strict and binding than the formal marriage ceremony.

O Mary and Joseph, obtain for me the grace of unfailing confidence in God.

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We should not be wrong in supposing that Mary would never have consented to marriage except for grave reasons. If the Apostle Paul, declaring that he had the Spirit of God,

counseled virginity as the more blessed state, surely Mary, in her supereminent wisdom, must have held the same view. Moreover, many of the Fathers say that Mary, instructed by the Holy Spirit, was, perhaps, the first to make the vow of virginity, yet on condition that the divine Will did not ordain otherwise. The motive which above all others influenced Mary in consenting to matrimony was the will of God manifested to her, first of all, by the Law, which ordained that daughters who were to inherit property should *marry into a clan of their ancestral tribe so that . . . all the Israelites will retain their own ancestral heritage.*

The marriage festival itself was probably celebrated at Nazareth, the peaceful village of gracious Galilee, rather than in the royal city of Jerusalem. It all happened as if in the normal course of everyday life in a small Eastern village. Mary and Joseph were to continue to live in the obscurity which Jesus would later share with them during the years of His hidden life. All that was unusual in their lives, all that was divine, was hidden beneath the appearance of ordinary human living. Yet, the prophecies, the figures of the Old Testament, the hopes of Israel, had for centuries looked toward this peaceful solemnity, this kindling of the hearth fire of the Holy Family. Now Jesus could take authentically, before all, the name, *Son of David*, under which the unhappy and the afflicted so often invoked Him with confidence. The lovely garden of the infancy and childhood of Jesus was now ready, where He would be surrounded with adoration, love, and solicitude, and where He would spend the sweetest and happiest hours of His mortal life.

Upon St. Joseph this ceremony conferred the headship of the Holy Family and legal fatherhood of the Messiah, the Son of God. From this day forth he was to enjoy the

unspeakable happiness and the inestimable privilege of living in intimacy with Mary and later with Jesus; and now he possessed an enduring right to their affection and gratitude. On her side, Mary found in Joseph an unimpeachable witness to her virginity, a strong and loving support, a vigilant guardian, and a devoted consoler. Let us congratulate Mary and Joseph on their happiness and, since one always offers some gift on the occasion of a marriage, let us present to the two holy spouses our resolution to practice some one of the virtues they exemplified on this day.

O Mary, my Mother, and my great Protector, St. Joseph, how pure, virtuous, and divine must have been all that entered into the external celebration of your blessed union. As I try to picture to myself your modesty and delicate reserve, your recollection and intimate union with God through it all, I remember with shame my own distractedness and want of piety even in prayer and at my religious exercises. Help me, dear Mary and Joseph, to be less given to idle curiosity and fickleness of mind. You teach me also in this mystery how I can sanctify my exterior works and make all meritorious for heaven, provided that I do all in conformity with the divine will. What happiness for us that you allowed yourselves to be guided by Providence in consenting to marriage! Help me to obey the will of God as you did, however it may manifest itself.

DECEMBER 8

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*The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 880)

*The Precursor*



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“This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall make ready thy way before thee’” (Mt. 11:10).

The prophet Malachias, whose words our Savior quotes in this passage, represents the Messiah as speaking, but in St. Matthew’s Gospel the words are given as being addressed to Christ by the Father.

O glorious Precursor of my Redeemer, help me to prepare my heart worthily for His coming.

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The birth of St. John the Baptist had been announced by the prophets as a sign of the imminent coming of the Messiah. Even before his birth the miraculous circumstances connected with the message of the archangel Gabriel to Zachary prepared the hearts of the people for the Savior’s advent by awakening their expectations. As marvel followed marvel in the events preceding the birth of John, the report of them was spread throughout the hill country of Judea and *all who heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, “What then will this child be?”* Zachary’s disbelief of the archangel’s promise was permitted by God in order to draw the people’s attention more strongly to subsequent happenings.

His sudden muteness, which was the punishment inflicted upon Zachary for his incredulity, made it impossible for him to serve in the Temple. This fact attracted notice and interest which grew to astonishment when it was learned that despite the advanced age of Zachary and Elizabeth,

a child was to be born of them. In this way, by drawing the attention of the people to John's conception and so turning their minds to the ancient prophecies, God permitted the Precursor of the Savior to prepare His way, as it were, from the first moment of his existence. John was later to say, *but in the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know*; yet he, in a sense, knew and proclaimed the Lord even before his own birth. Again, while still in his mother's womb, the infant John leaped for joy because the Savior had come, although men around him were completely unaware that the time of their redemption was at hand.

Several of the Fathers are of the opinion that the Holy Spirit Himself revealed to Elizabeth the name that was to be given the Precursor, just as Zachary had been informed of it by the archangel Gabriel; for she it was who first declared that his name was to be John. Then, Zachary, having written on a tablet, *John is his name*, recovered his speech and, filled with the Holy Spirit, broke out into his canticle of praise and thanksgiving in which the near approach of the Messiah and the mission of His holy Precursor are prophesied. Thus, the father of John as well as John himself glorified Jesus before His advent. The Church repeats daily in her Office the two canticles of exultation over the coming of the Redeemer that were first sung before His birth, namely, the *Magnificat* of Mary and the *Benedictus* of Zachary. She also has us say the *Benedictus* in our itinerary prayers and as part of the burial ceremony. Jesus is, in all truth, *the horn of our salvation*, whose graces and blessings accompany us daily throughout our whole lives and even to the threshold of eternity.

O great St. John the Baptist, it was your mission to go before the



Lord, and prepare His way. You were to bear witness to the Light and proclaim His coming. I, too, am called to go before His face and prepare a way for Him in the souls of others. Obtain for me an interior fire of zeal like yours, that will penetrate to the deepest recesses of my soul; for my influence for good will be no greater than my personal holiness. Help me to understand that ordinary virtue is not sufficient either to save my own soul or the souls entrusted to me.

DECEMBER 10

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*Translation of the Holy House of Loreto*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 882)

DECEMBER 11

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*The Trial of Mary and Joseph*



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“Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:20).

To console and reward St. Joseph for his prudence and patience under a most cruel trial, God sent an angel to reveal to him the mystery of the Incarnation and the supernatural manner in which our Savior had been conceived by the Virgin Mary.

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O Mary and Joseph, help me to practice the virtues of prudence and patience.

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Mary had said nothing to St. Joseph about her supernatural conception of our Savior; yet the natural signs of conception revealed themselves more and more. For both Mary and Joseph this was a very painful trial. These two souls, who loved each other so dearly and enjoyed the greatest mutual confidence, were the cause, each for the other, of very keen suffering; yet without the slightest fault on the part of either. Trials are usually easier to bear when we can lighten the burden by sharing it with another. Here, however, this relief was not to be had, for the very nature of their trial made Mary and Joseph a cross to each other. Mary, on her side, saw herself the object of a most terrible suspicion on the part of her just and most pure spouse. St. Joseph, on the other hand, was a prey to dreadful anxiety, that perhaps his confidence in Mary had been misplaced, or that he had been deceived in the esteem which he had for her. But God had decreed this heavy trial for them, so that Mary might exercise heroic patience, and that the great prudence of St. Joseph might be revealed.

Let us listen to St. Bonaventure as he ponders this incident in the Gospel narrative:

Now Joseph did look many times on Mary and grief and trouble of heart fell upon him and his displeasure was seen in his face and he turned his eyes away from her as one that was guilty of that which he perforce suspected. See how God permits His servants to be afflicted and sorely tried, that they may so receive their crown. Now Joseph was minded to put her away privately. In very truth may it be said of this holy man that his praise is in the Gospel, for the Gospel says of him that he was a just man; that is, a man of great virtue. For although they say that no shame, nor suffering, nor insult can befall a man so grievous as that of his wife's

unfaithfulness; yet did Joseph restrain himself withal and would not accuse Mary, but bore this great injury patiently. He sought not how to avenge himself, but, overcome with pity and wishing to forgive, he was minded to put her away privately.

But herein also had our Lady her share of tribulation, for she took notice of Joseph's trouble and it sorely grieved her. Yet did she humbly hold her peace and hide the gift of God. Better did it seem unto her that evil should be thought of her than that she should reveal the divine mystery and say aught of herself which would come nigh to boasting. Therefore did she beseech our Lord that Himself would right this matter, and make pass this grief from Joseph and herself. Here you may learn what great tribulation and anxiety was theirs. But God came unto their assistance. He therefore sent His angel who spoke to Joseph in his sleep and told him that his spouse had conceived of the Holy Ghost and he was to abide with her in all surety and joy. Whereupon the tribulation ceased and they were both exceedingly comforted. So likewise would it befall us if we would suffer patiently, for after a storm God sends the calm.

O Mary and Joseph, would that I might learn from you how to conduct myself in the trials God sends me! So often I fail in prudence, discretion, and most of all, in patience. Whenever I am tempted or under trial, help me to recall your most holy example in this mystery and obtain for me the grace to imitate it.

*The Faith of St. Joseph*



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“And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is called Christ” (Mt. 1:16).

By his alliance with Mary St. Joseph was intimately associated with the future Messias; in the plan of divine Wisdom, he was a necessary part of the preparation for the Incarnation.

Good St. Joseph, obtain for me faith that is strong and unquestioning like yours.

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Never was faith more severely tried than the faith of St. Joseph. The mystery of the Incarnation in which he was asked to co-operate was entirely unknown to him. Mary had told him nothing; she wisely left all such disclosures to God. Like every divine mystery that of the Incarnation does violence to human reason. But while we, in order to doubt the Lord and His promises, must shut our eyes to twenty centuries of irrefutable testimony to the truth of His words, St. Joseph, in order to believe had to shut his eyes to the evidence. Everything about the external accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation was calculated to scandalize an Israelite accustomed to the notion of Jehovah's ineffable glory and majesty; but the faith of St. Joseph was magnificently equal to the challenge. We are inclined to waver if one difficulty seems to oppose a revealed truth, but St. Joseph established his faith so firmly upon the word of God, conveyed to him by an angel, and this in a dream, that nothing thereafter was able to shake it. How much deeper and more

stable our peace would be if the word of God transmitted to us by our Superiors and our rules was the only guide of our actions, and if nothing, even in our thoughts, ever took precedence over it!

Like Mary, Joseph was happy in having believed and, because of his faith, the name of Joseph too has been blessed by all generations. Although he was only an obscure laborer in an insignificant and even despised little village, this scion of the house of David attained far greater glory than his most renowned ancestors. He, with Mary, was the sole first witness of the advent of the Messias, desired and heralded for so many centuries. Moses was not permitted to come directly into the presence of the divine Majesty, but the great God Incarnate came Himself to the arms of St. Joseph. What dignity is comparable to that of this just man to whom the King and Queen of heaven were subject! And this unimaginable greatness was bestowed upon St. Joseph because he himself aspired to no other greatness than that of serving God. The world will be greatly astonished one day when it will finally see those to whom God gives the preference. What a reversal of earthly values there will be when the powerful and the illustrious in the eyes of the world will be passed over, while the meek and the poor in spirit will become the princes of heaven! Human pride rebels at these truths, but they form the essence of the Gospel; if we do not accept them, we have not understood the Gospel.

O glorious patriarch, St. Joseph, be my father, my patron, and my guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me strong faith, poverty of spirit, and a more fervent interior life. Following your example I desire to direct all my actions to the greater glory of God, in union with you and your immaculate Spouse. Pray for me especially, good St. Joseph, that I may share in

the peace and joy that were yours at the hour of your holy death.

DECEMBER 13

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### *Spiritual Progress of St. John Baptist*



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“And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Lk. 1:80).

Spiritual progress in St. John went hand in hand with his physical and intellectual development; and strength was the characteristic feature of this progress.

O St. John Baptist, teach me how to grow in holiness through my observance of silence.

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We should expect the child John to advance steadily in strength of spirit. The extraordinary graces bestowed on him even before his birth should not decrease afterward, nor become less effective in accomplishing their work. If the Virgin Mother remained with her cousin until after the birth of the Precursor, the affection she must have manifested for this wonderful child would have been in itself the occasion of exceptional grace for him; just as her mere salutation had been when she first entered the house of Zachary after the Annunciation. It is sweet to think of the infant John in Mary's arms, literally fulfilling there, even in his infancy, his mission as Precursor of Jesus.

The Gospel tells us also that John was in the desert until the day of his public manifestation. Like the Lamb of God whom he was to proclaim, John withdrew into the desert

before entering upon his preaching career. There he led for about twenty years a life of solitude, prayer, and rigorous austerity. Is it not extraordinary that he who was divinely appointed to prepare the way of the Messiah and who, even in his mother's womb bore witness to the Word made flesh, did not once leave his desert retreat to go to Him, but awaited there the hour decreed by God for his manifestation? *The word of God came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert*, says St. Luke. God has His own ways of preparing His instruments. In solitude and retreat they grow in purity; austerity gives them strength, and prolonged prayer unites them more closely to Him. The Church, therefore, applies to St. John, thus tempered and disciplined, the words of the prophet Isaias: *And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand he has protected me, and has made me as a chosen arrow: in his quiver he has hidden me.*

But when the time appointed for his preaching and baptizing arrived, St. John came forth fearlessly and at once. Through prayer his soul had become tranquil, absorbed in God. His long silence had prepared him to speak, but the words that he uttered were not comforting to many of his hearers. He preached the hard truths of the necessity of penance and self-denial; he pitilessly showed to the Pharisees and Sadducees the pride and wretchedness of their own souls. It was in silence that St. John learned to speak those wholesome, life-giving words that imparted a bracing energy and vigor to souls of good will. If only we would control our tongues for even a few days, we should begin already to see our duties, our faith, and God's designs for us in a new and clearer light. Our speech would be the fruit of conversation with God and the light we would impart to the

souls of others would be the reflection of the light we ourselves had received from Him.

Glorious St. John Baptist, teach me how to retire into the quiet of my own heart and there recognize and confess my sinfulness. Help me to keep my soul alert and expectant as I await the coming of the Word of God in the mysterious and holy darkness of Advent.

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DECEMBER 14

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### *The Preaching of St. John Baptist*



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“Make ready the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth; and all mankind shall see the salvation of God” (Lk.:3:4-6).

Picture St. John surrounded by the rugged landscape which itself suggests the imagery which he used in his preaching.

O St. John Baptist, help me to see all that is rough, hard, and difficult in my manner; my words, and my actions; and show me how to make all smooth, level, and pliant for the coming of Jesus.

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Using the imagery of the straightening and leveling of a road, a customary preparation for the passage of the great ones of the earth, St. John bids us prepare the way of the Lord. “*Every valley shall be filled,*” he says, quoting the prophet Isaias. The valleys represent the voids in our life; that is, our sins of omission with regard to our duties to



God and our neighbor, our use of time, the obligations of our state. "*And every mountain and hill shall be brought low*"; that is, all haughtiness and arrogance of manner and conversation, all worldly ambition, all spiritual pride are to be brought down to the level plain of a sincere acknowledgment that of ourselves we are nothing; and even worse, that we are sinners.

Again, our Savior's way to our hearts must be made straight; that is, our intentions must be purified, so that we will act to please Him alone and offer to Him all that we do. If we follow the crooked paths of natural and selfish motives, we only prolong our journey and weary ourselves, beside running the risk that the night when none can labor may take us unaware. The *rough ways* which are to be made smooth are our inequalities of mood and conduct. It is true, however, that the ways of the Lord are very often steep and rocky and sometimes lead down into valleys and over mountains. But we must not let ourselves be deterred from following Him because of this; for the remembrance of His cross can make the rough ways seem level and smooth.

*And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.* The Savior, sent by the Father, came for all men and His coming has been announced to all; yet, many have not received Him and by some He is not even recognized. The day will come, however, when all men will come to know Him as their Judge; then, woe to those who were unwilling to acknowledge Him as their Savior. As for us, even though we daily profess our faith in Him, it may be that we do not always recognize Him in the daily circumstances of our lives. Perhaps, through our own fault, the reality also of His Eucharistic presence sometimes grows dim. Yet Christ stands always in the midst of us; His strength flows all about us through the Holy Sacrifice

of the Mass and the sacraments. The means of sanctification dispensed by St. John the Baptist were of the natural order and, in themselves, weak; but his zeal and spirit infused power and efficacy into them. What might we not be able to achieve, with all the supernatural means of sanctification at our disposal, if only we would put the full intensity of our will into the task!

Divine Savior, make my heart more attentive to Your voice, warning me of my transgressions, and urging me to prepare the path whereby You desire to come to me. Hasten Your coming, O Jesus! By Your all-powerful grace, level and straighten the road whereon You will come to reign in my heart. Let Your grace work in me until all my words and actions are sweetened and made gentle like Yours.

DECEMBER 15

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### *The Baptism of Repentance*



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“And he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk. 3:3).

The general purpose of St. John the Baptist’s ministry was to prepare men for the coming of the Savior; the preparation itself was to be motivated by his preaching of penance and of faith in Jesus Christ.

Holy Precursor of our Savior, obtain for me the grace of keen spiritual sensitiveness.

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The very appearance of St. John the Baptist in his garment of camel’s hair, girded with leather, was in perfect harmony

with his vocation. He preached poverty and mortification by his whole aspect as well as by his manner of life. Reflection upon St. John's personal austerity and the theme of his preaching, namely, penance for the remission of sins, leads us to a humiliating advertence to ourselves and our own, perhaps fitful and halfhearted, practice of penance. The omnipotent God Himself cannot forgive sins unless there is true repentance in the heart of the sinner; and this repentance of the heart tends to express itself in a penitential manner of life.

But even when we are in sincere dispositions of amendment, we still may have only a confused awareness of our sins. It is only as we grow in grace and purity that our spiritual perceptions become sharper and our compunction, consequently, more real. The contrition of the saints is deep and strong because they possess more grace and are purer than we. As the warmth of grace penetrates and softens the heart, so, by degrees, sorrow for sin deepens; then is acquired that fineness of perception whereby one sees oneself truly for the great sinner he is. A deepening of contrition and an increased sensitiveness to our faults should be the chief effect of frequent confession. Gradually, assisted by the grace of the sacrament of penance, we should be able to repent sincerely and efficaciously of even our smallest sins.

In leading us today to the desert and again showing us St. John the Baptist, the Church in her maternal solicitude desires to awaken or increase in the hearts of her children the spirit of compunction, as a preparation for the great feast of the Nativity. The voice of the austere Precursor first sounded in the deserts of Judea; its echoes were then heard in the cities and so have passed down the centuries to us: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" The king-

dom of heaven, as represented by the Church militant, has already come for us. We are the members, born heirs, so to speak, of this kingdom. But we still await the coming of the kingdom of heaven represented by the Church triumphant. The moment which is to decide whether we shall be admitted into this kingdom or banished from it may not be far off. At any hour it may arrive; and we know from our Savior Himself that it will come unexpectedly.

O Savior of mankind, I desire to obey the voice of Your Precursor and repent with sincere contrition of the sins that impede Your action in my soul. Grant me the grace of being baptized in the waters of penance that I may be worthy of Your baptism in the Spirit of Love. Awaken my soul to a clear knowledge of You and of myself. Purify my heart, so that with all my powers I may turn to You and find rest in real and loving union with You.

DECEMBER 16

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*Jesus, Alpha and Omega*



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“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1).

Elevate yourself in spirit to the contemplation of the life of Jesus in eternity, before the creation of the world.

O holy Evangelist, St. John, lift my gaze with yours to the contemplation of the Word, who was in the beginning *in the bosom* of the Father.

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The age of the One who reposes in the Virgin’s womb is

eternity. Before our earth was formed, before the creation and fall of the angels, before all time, at the beginning of all things, He is. Uncreated and without beginning, He is *the ancient of days*, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end of all things. *And the Word was with God*: the life of the Word, before time and before creation, was in the bosom of the Father, whence all good descends and whither all beauty returns. The place of His generation and dwelling was in the light of divinity, in the abyss of the uncreated Good, in the shoreless ocean of love and beatitude. The Word of God, moreover, is equal to God, possessing the same divine nature, the same power, honor, and joy. *Yours is princely power in the day of your birth in holy splendor*, says the royal prophet; *before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you*. From all eternity the Word lived and reigned in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit in endless beatitude and infinite power.

The divine life of our Savior in eternity is not without its intimate relation to us; for we also are from eternity in the sense that we were thought of and loved from eternity as possible images of the divinity, as potential reflections of the divine majesty and goodness. God was not alone in His eternity. By the communications of His creative goodness, innumerable and marvelous multitudes of possible creatures surrounded Him, one nobler and more beautiful than the other, forming, as it were, another world or another aspect of His divine essence. We were as tiny, infinitesimal drops in this ocean of possible beings. Moreover, the knowledge God had of these countless images of the effusion of His divine goodness was in the Word, the Word to whom Holy Scripture gives the name Wisdom, and who is the mirror, the total expression of the Wisdom of the Father. In Him

the Father contemplated all the ideas of possible creatures, and it was in Him also that they were given life.

How sweet and consoling it is to reflect that we were first known and loved in the Word of God and were first given life in Him! Whenever we contemplate the mysteries of the earthly life of our Savior, we should try to keep also before our minds His eternal life as the Word of God and His eternal love and choice of us. This thought should be with us especially as we gaze upon Him in the crib and dying upon the cross. Although He was born in Bethlehem and died on Calvary, He is eternal. He is the beginning who has no beginning. He is our God and our Savior, ever to be blessed and adored for all eternity.

*Blessed art thou, O Lord the God of our fathers; and worthy to be praised and glorified, and exalted above all forever. And blessed is the holy name of thy glory; and worthy to be praised and exalted above all in all ages. Blessed art thou in the holy temple of thy glory, and exceedingly to be praised, and exceeding glorious forever. Blessed art thou on the throne of thy kingdom, and exceedingly to be praised, and exalted above all forever. Blessed art thou, that beholdest the depths, and sittest upon the cherubim, and worthy to be praised and exalted above all forever. Blessed art thou in the firmament of heaven, and worthy of praise, and glorious forever (Dan. 3:52-56).*

*Jesus Living in Mary*



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“The Lord is now nigh; come, let us adore Him” (invitatory of Matins for the third Sunday of advent).

Let us contemplate the life of our Savior during the nine months before His birth.

O Mary, prepare my soul to be a fit dwelling place for the incarnate King of kings.

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The life of our Savior in His Mother’s womb was a life of obscurity and confinement; yet Jesus was the infinite God, the Light of the angels and of the whole universe. It was also a life of silence. The Word of the Father, the Teacher of the prophets, hid Himself in the womb of His Mother and veiled Himself in silence. All through His earthly life Jesus was characterized by discretion and moderation in speech; and Mary and Joseph learned how to speak and how to be silent from His example. Again, our Savior’s life in Mary’s womb was a life of utter weakness and submission. What dependence could be more complete than that of a child in its mother’s womb?

What are the occupations of Jesus during the long months of this silent, hidden confinement? He prepares Himself to be our Redeemer. He forms His body in order to offer it one day on Calvary and then in the Holy Eucharist. His eyes are made to look upon us with mercy and compassion and to weep for us. His lips are formed to teach and console us; His feet, to seek us out and lead us to the fold of the Good Shepherd. His hands are formed to heal and bless and

to be extended finally on the cross. His heart is formed to love us and His precious blood to be shed for our sins, and then to be our drink in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus prepares His whole body to be a sacrifice of immolation.

Jesus in Mary's womb also adores and praises God and rejoices in His heavenly Father and in the Holy Spirit. He takes joy also in Himself, in His divine Sonship, and in the perfection and holiness of His human nature. He rejoices in the thought that He has willed to become our Redeemer and in the vision of the future of the Church He is to establish. But in bitter grief He beholds the malice of sin and the ravages it has made in the kingdom of God. In sorrow He sees His own passion and cross, all the sufferings of His life and the sufferings of the Church in the ages to come. Furthermore, He sanctifies Mary and, in due proportion, St. Joseph, identifying them more and more with Himself by granting them marvelous advances in the knowledge of the great mystery of the Incarnation and in bestowing upon them graces of unitive love. Finally, He sanctifies the world and governs it. He is the heart and center of the government of heaven and earth. Ceaselessly, the waves of glory ascend from Him to heaven; ceaselessly, He pours out His grace upon the earth, upon the poor pagan world, the believing Israelites, the tempted, the dying. Floods of consolation stream forth from Him to Limbo. And, as invisible and hidden Master of the universe, He judges all souls leaving this world to enter eternity.

O Jesus, living in Mary, You are present in me also by sanctifying grace; show me how to deepen my interior life, how to be more prayerful, recollected, and zealous; so that Your divine action may increase and show its power in me and through me, ever more and more.



## *The Expectation of Our Lady*



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“He whom the whole world cannot contain enclosed Himself in your womb, being made man” (from the Gradual of the Mass, *Salve, Sancta Parens*).

The life of Mary after the Incarnation and before the birth of Jesus was a life of intimate union with Him, a union relating to both her soul and body.

O Mary, teach me how to live in interior union with you and Jesus.

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The Sovereign Good reposed in Mary and acted in her by virtue of the closest of unions, that of a mother and her unborn child, for they are one and the same life. All the powers of Mary's soul, likewise, were concentrated upon the God-Man. More and more she came to see by Jesus' eyes, to love with His heart, and to share His interests. She became wholly penetrated with the most precious lights, that revealed ever more clearly the mystery of the Redemption and its meaning for the Chosen People and all humanity; thus Mary was initiated more and more intimately into her sublime role as Mother of God.

All creation aspires to see God, to contemplate Him, and to enjoy His presence. But Mary was really going to look upon the face of the Incarnate Son of God, the created image of the divine perfection. She would see those divine features revealed in all the beauty and charm of infancy, and she would recognize in that beautiful visage her own Child.

All creation was waiting for Jesus with longing desire — the world, that it might at last find peace; the angels, that they might see the accomplishment of the divine decree. The heavenly Father Himself was waiting to contemplate His created image. All these desires met and united their intensity in Mary's single heart, growing and sharpening as the moment so long awaited drew nearer. Exteriorly, however, the life of Mary was all tranquillity and lovable naturalness. Everything within her was so exalted, extraordinary, and divinely splendid; yet she was not overwhelmed. What must have been the grandeur of the natural endowments of the Mother of God, how great must have been the excellence of her personality, that she did not sink under the weight of the divine favors!

Mary's life during her Expectation is the magnificent model of the interior life of a Christian. We also bear Christ within us. By sanctifying grace we are stamped with the supernatural image of the divine filiation and after Holy Communion the image becomes reality. Jesus wishes to bring about spiritually in our hearts an incarnation like to that which He effected physically in Mary. He desires to be born in us, to grow, to reign, and to reveal Himself through us. Our life, therefore, must be modeled on Mary's. In imitation of her we must concentrate all our thoughts and aspirations upon Jesus. We too must be guided only by supernatural views and perform all our actions only in a supernatural spirit.

O holy Mother of God, graciously deign to unite me to that ardent desire of yours to see Jesus, who was concealed for nine months in your chaste womb, and to gaze with your own eyes upon the features of the Incarnate Son of the Father, who was also your Son. Help me, O Mary, to enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus' birth. Give efficacy to my

preparation by your all-powerful prayers, so that when the solemn moment comes, Jesus may find no obstacle to the accomplishment of His spiritual birth in my heart.

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### *The First Acts of Our Unborn Savior*



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“Behold I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me, to do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!” (Ps. 39:8, 9)

Adore the Word Incarnate in the act of submission made by Him in the first moment of His awareness that in Him human nature was united to the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity.

Divine Savior, teach me to adore, thank, and love God in the dispositions in which You performed these acts on earth.

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The life of the God-Man commenced with the Incarnation. From the first instant and in all truth and reality His life manifested itself in the highest and fullest exercise of His intelligence and will. The first act God demands of His creature is adoration. By this act we acknowledge Him as the Supreme Being, the Source of all good, and the Cause of our existence by His creative power; by it we also submit to Him all that we are and all that we have. Adoration, therefore, was the first act of the great and beautiful soul of our Savior. All the powers of His soul were fused in an act of submission to His Father, such as the whole sum of creation could not have produced.

The second act of our Savior was one of joyful thanksgiving. Very often during His mortal life, He gave thanks to God, especially when the Father gave Him the opportunity of doing good. But was there ever a time when His thankfulness was greater than at the instant which marked the commencement of His life, when, receiving all from God, He raised His whole Being to Him in an ineffable transport of gratitude and joy? The third act of the Incarnate Word was one of love for God as the Sovereign Good and as His Father. In the humanity which He had assumed the Son of God found, as it were, a new instrument, a new means of manifesting His eternal love for His Father; and the Holy Spirit had endowed His sacred humanity with all the power of His own love. Oh, the ineffableness of that first transport of love! Finally, after so many centuries, the purpose of creation, namely, the fulfillment of the command given to man to love God with his whole heart and soul and strength was attained.

These first acts of the God-Man were, moreover, infinite with respect to dignity and merit. They were accomplished with absolute perfection, for the soul of the God-Man produced them and directed them to an infinitely sublime and worthy end. By consequence of the direct vision of God which He always enjoyed, our Savior knew and saw all the reasons for which God is worthy of love and adoration. Again, these acts once produced in His heart were to continue forever; God, adoration of Him, love of Him, gratitude to Him were always to constitute the very essence of our Savior's life. Finally, they were not only private acts, but they were offered to God in the name of all created beings. The adoration, love, and gratitude of the God-Man embraced the whole extent of creation.

O my Jesus, what happiness for me that I, even I, was present in the first acts of Your sacred heart. You knew and loved me even then; and already You were longing for my salvation. In You and through You I adored, thanked, and loved God as He deserves to be loved, adored, and thanked.

DECEMBER 20

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*The Humility of Our Unborn Savior*



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“And appearing in the form of man, he humbled himself”  
(Phil. 2:7).

Never had there been and never was there to be an act of humility more profound than that made by the God-Man in the first moment of His life.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of loving and serving You unselfishly.

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Jesus saw clearly, on the one hand, the majesty and grandeur to which human nature had been elevated in Him; on the other, He saw the lowliness, the infinite inferiority of that human nature. He fully understood that its elevation in Him was due to an absolutely gratuitous grace. With relation to us, He knew that this gratuitous grace, considered in itself, placed Him above the wretchedness that was ours because of sin; yet in Himself, as regards His human nature alone, He was simply that which we are. This is why He did not consider it beneath Him to be the servant of God and our servant. Even when as man He associated with men and found them so miserable and so pitifully weak, this deep humility was always in His heart. If, in His relations with others, even

with the greatest sinners, He showed Himself always so gentle, so full of sweetness and mercy, it was precisely because of the humility with which His heart was penetrated from the first instant of His life.

The humility of Jesus, as well as His love for God and us, gave rise to another adorable act. It is the teaching of some theologians that God revealed to the Savior at the first moment of His conception all the means whereby we could be saved, leaving Him at liberty to choose from among these means; and His choice would then be the will and order of His heavenly Father. According to this opinion, our Savior would at that moment have chosen in its least details and with complete freedom the course of His earthly life. The probability that there was this choice on His part is strengthened by the words of St. Paul, who writes in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured a cross, despising shame.*

What more powerful motive could be offered to us for the practice of patience in the sufferings of this life for the love of Jesus than to think of Him as freely choosing for our sake the way of suffering? He might have appeared among us in a state of impassibility; or, disdainingly to submit to hardship, He might have accomplished the work of our redemption while enjoying the power and glory of a king and priest, like David, Solomon, or Moses. The Father's honor would have received full satisfaction had He chosen one of these alternatives. But the way He did choose led Him along the path of poverty, suffering, and humiliation — a path that became ever narrower and more difficult, until finally it ended on Calvary. The religious life is none other than the life of Jesus Christ. What was this life? It was a poor crib and a sorrowful cross; and between the crib and

the cross thirty-three years of self-denial and sacrifice.

Divine Savior, who can comprehend the mystery of Your mortal life, totally stamped as it was with the sign of sacrifice! Why did You choose hardship and pain when You might have had joy, and still have not only redeemed us, but also won the right to our love and gratitude? Was it not love, the incomprehensible love of Your sacred heart for us, that inspired Your choice? We had sinned, and in order to save our souls we were condemned to suffering and temporal evils. Your example and companionship would make the road easier for us and give us consolation and courage; and so, You, the all-holy and sinless One, chose to be our Brother by walking before us in this vale of tears, as well as by sharing our human nature. Eternal praise and glory be Yours, O Jesus! How can we ever be grateful enough for Your generous, faithful love of us!

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DECEMBER 21

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*The Imperial Decree*



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“Now it came to pass in those days, that there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that a census of the whole world should be taken” (Lk. 2:1).

Adore the dispensations of divine Wisdom in the circumstances surrounding the birth of our Savior.

O Jesus, grant me the grace to practice blind obedience.

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Eternal Wisdom had arranged every detail of our Lord's coming into the world. It had decreed the position of the nations in space, their rank and prestige, and in particular

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the sequence of events that immediately preceded the Nativity. Each in turn, the prophecies had been fulfilled. As the prophets had foretold, the inheritance of the Chosen People was now in the hands of the Gentiles, and the land promised to Abraham was only a province of the vast Roman empire. So completely had the scepter been taken from Juda that Roman functionaries were to take the census even in territory that was under Herod's jurisdiction.

Also in accordance with the designs of Providence, the Emperor Augustus had now issued a decree ordering a census of the Roman world. Each citizen of that vast realm was to register his name in the town of his birth. The publication of the decree was the immediate occasion of a vast movement throughout the whole extent of Roman dominion. Millions traversed the great Roman roads, submitting, as they thought, to the will of a human prince; but it was God whom they were really obeying. This world-wide agitation had in reality only one object: to bring to Bethlehem a man and a woman who lived at Nazareth in Galilee, so that a Child might be born in Bethlehem. The little village of Juda, whose name means "House of Bread," was chosen out of all the cities of Juda to be the birthplace of the living Bread that came down from heaven.

To Mary and Joseph the imperial order was a difficult trial, involving as it did a journey of several days in the rainy season of the year; but they obeyed, because in the authority of the pagan ruler of the Roman empire they recognized the authority of God. Humbly and without protest or objection they gave their blind obedience to the decree of an earthly monarch, who was himself unwittingly obeying the divine will. In the last analysis, it was through the submission of Mary and Joseph and, above all, through the stupendous



humility and obedience of the Incarnate Word of God, that the central event of the whole history of the world could take place in the manner ordained by the divine will.

O Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, how your tranquil submission to the decrees of divine Providence puts to shame my own willfulness! What excuse can I now find for my pride? You obeyed a pagan prince, simply, without objection or complaint; and I cling to my self-will even though I have bound myself by vow to the practice of obedience. Help me to conquer my waywardness and to learn from you how to submit to God's holy will.

DECEMBER 22

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### *The Journey to Bethlehem*



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“And Joseph also went from Galilee out of the town of Nazareth into Judea to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem” (Lk. 2:4).

Represent to yourself Joseph and Mary, who is carrying Jesus in her womb, on the way to Bethlehem.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, help me to imitate your spirit of recollection and prayer.

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With reserve and humility Mary and Joseph make their way to Bethlehem. For noble families of the country, and especially for the descendants of David, an occasion such as the official taking of a census could be utilized to attract attention and marks of respect; one had only to travel in a manner befitting one's illustrious name. But Mary and Joseph

make their journey like persons of ordinary rank. Perhaps they even step aside to allow other travelers to pass who are journeying more rapidly and in greater comfort. Yet who are Mary and Joseph? They are the noblest and holiest persons on earth. With what solemnity and pomp the Ark of the Covenant was borne over this same land! Yet here in Mary, the living Ark of the Covenant, reposed the Incarnate God Himself. Jesus, the Son of David, was now passing over land that had once belonged to His royal ancestor, but which was now subject to Gentile rule. Scarcely an inch of this ground had not witnessed miracles of mercy and justice worked by His Father Jehovah on behalf of the Jews of the Old Covenant, which was now about to be replaced by the New. Before long, this same land was to behold the greater marvels of the Messiah, when He would journey along this way performing His miracles of healing and pardon.

If it is true that the nearer God approaches the soul the greater is its recollection and the deeper its silence, how might we describe the interior sentiments of Joseph and Mary on this journey to Bethlehem? They alone know the great mystery of the Incarnation; they alone, by their prayer and ardent desires, represent the whole human race before the Savior. We may assume that they spoke little, and that even amid the noise and distraction all about them they remained absorbed in prayer. Throngs of men pass the holy travelers, each one intent upon reaching his native town to be enrolled in accordance with the edict. No one in all that crowd suspects the nearness of their Redeemer, and He does not force their homage. Nor does He today. Jesus is ever present with us in the Blessed Sacrament, but does He ever intrude upon our preoccupations with our own concerns in order to remind us of His presence?

Jesus, Redeemer of mankind, rising Sun of Justice, illumine the darkness of my heart. Increase my faith. O Mary, your inestimable privilege is now, by the mercy of your Son, extended to me and to all the children of the Church. After Holy Communion our bodies also contain the Word of God made man. Make my dispositions and thoughts in receiving the Holy Eucharist worthy of this unspeakable divine Gift; rather, help me to renounce my own dispositions that I may prepare my soul with yours.

DECEMBER 23

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### *The Search for Lodging*



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“There was no room for them in the inn” (Lk. 2:7).

Picture our Lady and St. Joseph registering at Bethlehem and then seeking shelter for the night.

Incarnate Word of God, teach me distrust of myself in the contemplation of this mystery of Your rejection by the world.

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Upon reaching Bethlehem Mary and Joseph go directly to the place where their names are to be enrolled, in accordance with the imperial decree. There is entered on the public register the name of Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth in Galilee; and, perhaps, as his spouse, the name of Mary is added. We are told by St. Justin and by Tertullian that the name of Jesus was also inscribed on this official register of the citizens of the Roman empire. But, whether we may accept this tradition or not, the still unborn King of kings does not manifest His presence to the agents of the emperor nor

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to the people of Bethlehem as He did to St. John the Baptist. Nor will they be directly notified of His birth. This great privilege is reserved for the pure and simple in heart, like the shepherds and the Wise Men. O Jesus, let not selfish thoughts and worldly desires blind us to Your presence in our daily life!

And our unborn Savior meets with worse than passive indifference. He is not given even a suitable place for His birth, when Mary and Joseph ask shelter at the inn of Bethlehem. *He was in the world, says the evangelist St. John, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* This is the first meeting of the Messiah and His people, *his own*, and they do not receive Him. Yet, in the East especially, hospitality is by ancient tradition commonly and freely given to all. For the Incarnate God alone there seemed to be no hospitality. He was to have the comfort of human shelter neither at His birth nor at His death. The world did not receive Him or know Him because He did not come in the manner that the world expected.

But the Heart of Jesus willingly and gladly accepted this first humiliation, this first affront that He received in the world. And He granted to Mary and Joseph the grace of a perfect conformity to His spirit. They knew how to find excuse for the people of Bethlehem and, filled with sentiments of patience and charity, they withdrew to a cave just outside the town. A beast's manger in an abandoned stable was the first resting place on earth of the only-begotten Son of God. He came to share our littleness and weakness and to communicate to us, in the immensity of His gratuitous love, a share in His divinity. To man to whom it had once been said, "You are dust," it was now said "You are God." Yet

that which was meanest and lowliest in our power to give was offered to our divine Benefactor, and even this was offered to Him as if grudgingly.

O Jesus, born in a stable, throughout Your whole public ministry You had no place whereon to lay Your head. But the only lodging You ever really desired was the hearts of men. Make my heart worthy to be Your dwelling place.

DECEMBER 24

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*The Eve of Our Savior's Birth*



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“This day you shall know that the Lord will come; and on the morrow you shall see his glory” (invitatory of Matins for Christmas Eve).

Contemplate Mary and Joseph in the stable-cave at Bethlehem awaiting the birth of Jesus.

O Mary and Joseph, grant me a share in your sentiments on the eve of our Savior's birth.

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Now at last the august and holy night has come, in which the Word made flesh first appeared among men. How quietly the earth came into the possession of its Savior! We should have expected that, in restoring a fallen world, a visible omnipotence equal, at least, to that which first created it would have been displayed. But the utter simplicity of the ways of divine Wisdom ever takes us by surprise. Like all other nights, this night spread its darkness over the whole earth, over the little town of Bethlehem. The world that obeyed the authority of the Caesars and the world of the barbarians,

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never suspecting that God was so near, had gone to rest, weary from the labors of the day and still more fatigued by the weight of sin. The sense of guilt, weariness from earthly toil, world-wide peace, finally achieved after a long succession of cruel and bloody wars—these, it appears, constituted humanity's whole preparation for the visible advent of its God. But in the bare little cave of Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph kept vigil on behalf of all mankind.

In spirit let us enter the cave and with lively faith adore the divine Child who is about to come to us. In this dark stable, on this straw, will soon be laid the infant form of One in whose presence even the angels are not pure, and before whom they veil themselves. How can we, poor sinners, worthily honor this great God who has so humbled His sovereign majesty for our sake? Let us ask the Virgin Mother and St. Joseph to unite our poor homage with their adoration. We should ask them also, and especially, to help us imitate their humility in the presence of the Incarnate Word who is about to appear. He will come in weakness and lowliness, in the total eclipse of His glory; but, like Mary and Joseph, we must never forget who He is and who we are, and adore with all the powers of our soul Him who stooped so low for love of us. Mingled with our sentiments of humility and adoration should be the liveliest feelings of gratitude—to the Father, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son; to the Holy Spirit, by whose overshadowing power the Word became incarnate in the immaculate womb of Mary; and to the adorable Son of God Himself, who comes to offer Himself because it is His own will. May the Holy Trinity fill our souls with spiritual joy on this holy eve of grace and hope!

*Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us acclaim the Rock*

*of our salvation. Let us greet him with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him. For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth, and the tops of the mountains are his. His is the sea, for he has made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel to the Lord who made us. For He is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides (Ps. 94:1-7).*

DECEMBER 25

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## *The Nativity of Our Savior*



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“For a Child is born to us” (Isa. 9:6).

Our Savior does not come to us as the King of kings and the Lord of lords whom St. John the Beloved saw in his apocalyptic vision, but in the lovable, appealing form of an infant.

O divine Infant, accomplish the mystery of Your birth also in my heart.

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Who is it who is born today in Bethlehem? The Word of God made flesh, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity. For love of us, the Son of God, equal in all things with the Father, has become a little Child. But, although He appeared among us as an infant, He might still have shown Himself outwardly that which He is in reality, the Master of the world. There is nothing at all of the Master, Lawgiver, or Judge, however, to be observed in Him. This blessed Child seems not even to be thinking of our sins, nor of the suffering they are to cause Him. There is nothing about the Babe

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of Bethlehem that could inspire any but feelings of confidence and love. Jesus in the crib, as on the cross, draws all things to Himself. It was His will to come to us not as a Master, but as one who serves. O abasement and annihilation of our God, how incomprehensible are you to finite creatures! Would it not be in the highest degree unfitting that, while the Eternal Word so humbles Himself, we should continue to nurse our pride? When shall we learn to become humble of heart, if not in beholding our divine Model so profoundly humiliated?

Yet our Savior does not appear in the world entirely devoid of magnificence. He has been born of a Virgin and the Virgin is' Mary. Moreover, centuries of preparation and intense longing have preceded this ineffable day of Christ's birth. And now, infinite joy and light stream from the cave of Bethlehem over the whole earth. Infinite glory and praise rise from the crib to heaven, to the very throne of the Most Holy Trinity. And the newborn Savior is, in turn, for the Blessed Trinity, the object of ineffable complacency. The whole Trinity inclines, all mercy and joy, over the cradle of this Child. The Father finds in the temporal birth of His Son a new paternity, and because of it blesses the earth. The Son experiences a new joy in becoming by His sacred humanity a part of visible creation; and never since the beginning was the created universe so beautiful as now. The Holy Spirit, the Love ever ancient and ever new, of the Father and the Son, reveals His infinite gladness in the appearance and song of the angels. The angelic hierarchies assemble in their choirs and the midnight sky resounds with their song of praise: "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will.*" This hymn to the birth of the Savior is a joyous revelation of His majesty and it is also



an angelic Christmas greeting to the world, a wish for the happiness of men whose nature has been so highly exalted and with so much love.

Holy angels who brought to us the glad tidings of our Savior's birth, what better expression could there be of the thoughts and feelings of our hearts on this blessed day of our redemption than your joyous canticle? From hearts filled with gladness and thanksgiving, we offer to God with you our praise and our sentiments of love for all mankind: "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will.*"

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DECEMBER 26

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### *The Shepherds at the Crib*



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"The shepherds said one to another, 'Let us go, then, to Bethlehem'" (Lk. 2:15).

Picture the shepherds setting out for the cave where Christ had just been born.

O Infant Jesus, deign to inspire me with the sentiments of the shepherds who adored You on the first Christmas day.

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As soon as they had heard the angelic message, the shepherds set out for the place of Christ's birth. St. Luke tells us *they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. And when they had seen, they made known what had been told them concerning this child. And all that heard marvelled at what was told them by the shepherds.* The humble, simplehearted shepherds, guarding their flocks during the silent watches of the night, were the

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first human beings after Mary and Joseph to learn the wondrous news of the Messiah's birth. The words of the angel announcing the glad tidings filled them with joy and they went with haste to Bethlehem. There was no delay because there was no pride. Prompt obedience is characteristic of the soul that submits completely to the divine will. There followed for the shepherds an interior light which enabled them to recognize the Babe whom they sought and prompted them to spread the good tidings of His birth: They *found . . . And when they had seen, they made known what had been told them concerning this child.* In order to recognize God in the swathing bands of His sacred word, of the Eucharist, or of His other mysteries, we have no need of human science. When we have become humble enough and perfectly clean of heart, God will not delay to send to our souls His light and His angels.

These shepherds of Bethlehem, the first adorers of the Word made flesh, the first fruits of Christianity, were graciously received by Mary and from her they received further instruction in the great mystery of Christ's birth. Angels, the Mother of God, and St. Joseph were the teachers of these humble shepherds. Jesus Himself flooded their souls with grace. One day Jesus will say that He came to teach the poor, and He begins His apostolate here at the crib. Then, these privileged men become apostles; shepherds are the predecessors of fishermen in transmitting the good tidings to the world. And so eloquent were they that *all that heard marvelled.* After this we hear no more of the shepherds. There was no mention of them before the appearance of the Christmas angel, and they are not spoken of again afterward. Only a single ray of our Savior's glory was shed upon them; but it was enough to give them immortality and make

them dear to every Christian heart. We never celebrate Christmas without remembering the shepherds of Bethlehem. O Infant Jesus, grant to my soul the graces You bestowed upon the shepherds. Through the operations of Your Holy Spirit, let me also pass from joyful desire to interior enlightenment and thence to good deeds, that my life may bear witness to the wonderful works of Your power.

DECEMBER 27

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### *The Word Made Flesh*



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“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). Picture St. John the Evangelist writing these words in the first chapter of his Gospel.

St. John, beloved disciple of Jesus, who has shown us the divinity of the Word in the bosom of the Eternal Father, lead me now to this same Word made flesh.

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Today let us invite to stand with us at the crib of the Infant Jesus him whom we shall find beside the cross, St. John the Beloved, the Virgin Disciple, Apostle, Evangelist, Eagle of the divine mysteries. St. John was especially loved by Jesus because of his purity. He who gives his whole heart to God, receives in return the whole Heart of the Savior, and this love of predilection lasts forever; for in heaven virgin souls are the special escort of the Lamb. Should not the hope of such a recompense suffice to make us love and practice the virtue that merits it? Even on this earth St. John penetrated more deeply than the other Apostles into the mysteries

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of the Incarnate Word. Not only did he become a seer and a prophet, the last and most sublime of the prophets, but he is also the doctor of divine love and of the life of grace.

In company with St. John let us see with our eyes of faith and touch by the aspirations of our souls the sacred humanity of the Word of life. For Jesus is truly man. Sin excepted, He has really the same nature as we. How unutterably sweet to reflect that He truly dwells among us still, that we can approach Him without fear and share with Him all that is inherent in our nature! He knows all, He has experienced all, *being beset*, as St. Paul says, *with weakness*, so that we might have a High Priest who could take pity on our infirmities. Between the Christ Child and us there should be no obstacle, no fear, no feeling of infinite distance. He is not a stranger, or a Being whose nature so far transcends ours that we can only adore. He is like us, united to us by the most intimate bonds, so that we are permitted to love Him and speak to Him freely and with confidence. Simply because we are men and His brethren we can be assured of the infinite love of His Heart, in spite of our misery and sinfulness.

Finally, let us ask St. John to present us to the Virgin Mother Mary. She will embrace us as her children, for in John we became the brothers of Jesus. "Peter shall have left to him the Church, the mother of men," says St. Peter Damien, "but John shall receive Mary, the Mother of God." Would that Mary might see in us true brethren of the Child she bore and admit us to a share in the special maternal love she has for St. John, the favored confidant of the secrets of Jesus!

O Jesus, I do not deserve that You should prefer me to anyone;  
but I prefer You to all others, and I ask of You a share in

the gifts You gave to St. John: a place near Your holy cross and in the special service of Your Mother.

DECEMBER 28

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### *The Poverty of the Infant Jesus*



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“You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:13).

Let us enter the cave with the shepherds and contemplate the poverty of the Word made flesh.

O divine Infant, give me a great love for holy poverty and the grace to practice it perfectly.

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Having described the marks whereby the shepherds were to recognize the Child Jesus, namely, that they would find an infant lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes, the angel added, “*And this shall be a sign to you.*” In order to make it unmistakably clear that the way to Him, and by Him to the Father, is to be found in detachment from material goods and in the conquest of ambition and avarice by poverty, Jesus gave His own example as a visible *sign*. The people of wealth and prestige filled the inn. The Master of the universe *chose* to lodge in a deserted stable with a manger for His crib. Here was the throne of the King of kings. Here He began the life of poverty and deprivation which would continue until His death on the cross; *being rich, he became poor for your sakes*, says St. Paul, *that by his poverty you might become rich*. And Mary at the crib,

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like Mary beside the cross, was unable to relieve the harsh circumstances of Jesus' birth.

Yet, for Mary there was a greater distress in seeing her God so unknown. When the son of a king is born, preparations are made long in advance and the news of his birth is quickly spread abroad; but here no one except the shepherds was aware of the royal birth in the stable of Bethlehem. No king nor priest nor saint received a revelation of the birth of the Savior, and yet there were saints in Israel whom this revelation would have greatly consoled. Mary and Joseph formed the sole human attendants of this royal Child, while material creation was represented by some animals, the cold of the winter night, and the rough straw. But Jesus voluntarily chose this poverty and obscurity, however much they may seem to have been only the result of circumstances.

As for Mary and Joseph themselves, the bareness and gloom of the stable became transformed by the presence of Jesus. Heavenly joy fills the soul that clings to God alone and seeks only to possess Him. In poverty and defeat, even in persecution and martyrdom, they who possess God are happy. If we wish to join Mary and Joseph near the throne of our Savior's poverty, we must strip ourselves in heart and spirit of all that we possess and sincerely renew our vow of leaving all and of following in real poverty the King of the poor.

O Jesus, all that I could ever possess in this world would really belong to You, but in Your goodness You deign to make my voluntary renunciation of earthly possessions a source of merit; and even in this life You give me a hundredfold recompense for this sacrifice. Help me to love and practice poverty more and more perfectly in the reality and in the spirit, so that I may become more closely united to You. But grant me in abundance Your love and Your grace. These are the riches I ask You to

bring today to my heart, which is far poorer and more unworthy of You than was the stable of Bethlehem.

DECEMBER 29

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*Mary, Cause of Our Joy*



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“Cause of our joy, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

Mary is the cause of our joy, first and foremost, because she is the Mother of our Redeemer.

O Mary, fill my heart with spiritual joy and teach me how to bring joy to others.

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Mary is the Mother of Sorrows and the Queen of Martyrs, but her life was filled with joy as well as with grief and pain. How could it be otherwise, if it is true that joy is proportioned to holiness? The more abundant the infusion of grace into the soul the greater is its happiness; therefore, she who possessed a plenitude of grace and sanctity must have held the supremacy in joy. As for Mary's happiness in Jesus, could we ever express or even conceive of the humble, tender, burning joy and love that filled our Lady's whole being when she saw the Infant Jesus for the first time in the cave of Bethlehem? Or her intense happiness, as she lived side by side with her Son, in knowing that His least action gave immense glory to God and in realizing her own share in that glorification? Furthermore, ever present in her heart, even along with the seven swords of sorrow, was the thought of the glory that would be given to God and the limitless

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grace that would flow for us and for her from the passion and death of the Savior. But deep and inconceivable as were the joys of Mary on earth, her heavenly joys are truly ineffable, far surpassing as they do the happiness of all the angels and saints, which is itself beyond telling.

Mary is, however, the joy-bringing as well as the joyful Mother of the Prince of Peace. She is a never-failing font of joy. It has been well said that Mary gives away her joy as soon as she has received it. In the Vesper antiphon for the feast of our Lady's birth the Church says to her, "Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God, brought joy to the whole world." Then after the Annunciation, Mary in eager haste came to the house of Zachary and Elizabeth where at the very sound of her voice the unborn child of Elizabeth leaped for joy. Again, the *good news of great joy* that Mary brought to the world on the first Christmas day was manifested by her to the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon, and Anna. At the marriage feast of Cana our Lady increased the happiness of the newly-married pair and of the Apostles by obtaining from her Son His first public miracle; and after our Savior's ascension into heaven Mary was the joy of St. John, the holy women, and the infant Church.

Finally, now that she reigns in her great light of heavenly glory she augments the joy of the angels and saints by her holiness and beauty; while the glory and praise she ceaselessly offers to the Blessed Trinity make her the eternal object of the divine complacency. But we invoke Mary specifically as the cause of *our* joy because, as she was its beginning, so she is also its completion. Our lives must be passed in a vale of tears, but if we love Mary and pray to her, we shall feel all heaviness drop away from our hearts. If we ask her, she will fill us with the joy of Christ, not only for our



sake, but that we may bring His joy to others in imitation of her; but unless He reigns in us as He did in Mary, we cannot hope to give Him to the world.

“Let my whole being rejoice in your presence, let my soul exult in you, beloved Mother! The tongue is powerless to speak of your grandeurs or the spirit to conceive of the wonder of you. And so I can only bow before you humbly and say to you prayerfully: Receive me into your arms, O my Mother, listen with love to the sighs of my heart, and receive with me all who are mine” (Thomas à Kempis).

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DECEMBER 30

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### *Spiritual Circumcision*



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“And they who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).

Represent to yourself the Infant Jesus offering to the Father in His circumcision the first fruits of His blood for the salvation of the world.

Q Infant Jesus, grant me the grace of atoning for my sins in this life through my fidelity in the religious life.

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In observing the law of circumcision, which was decreed only for sinners, the Incarnate Son of God, innocence and holiness itself, gave us a striking example of charity and humility, as well as of obedience. Of charity, in taking upon Himself through this act the crimes of the world and their chastisement; of humility, in submitting to a rite so far out of keeping with the dignity of His Person. But we shall

concern ourselves here especially with the example of mortification given us by our Infant Savior on the day of His circumcision. This rite was not intended to cause pain, yet we cannot doubt that Jesus, in submitting to it entirely without obligation, had among His other intentions that also of suffering. He was fully aware, too, of the future pain that was signified by this act. The Infant Jesus heard and understood the prophecy of Simeon; He was aware of the grief it caused His Mother. He knew that death on the cross awaited Him, but with all His heart He desired it. For Jesus no obstacle was insurmountable where the will of His Father and our salvation were concerned.

But it was the circumcision of the spirit and the heart, more than that of the flesh, which our Savior exemplified in subjecting Himself to the ancient rite. With regard to ourselves, this spiritual circumcision can be entirely achieved through the observance of our Rule,\* because in their total effect its prescriptions lead to perfect self-abnegation. Fidelity to the Rule is an easy means both of doing penance and of attaining perfection. We wish, for example, to sleep longer, but a bell calls us to meditation; we wish to prolong recreation, but the Rule forbids it. From morning until night, as true religious, we deny ourselves and carry our cross, because, however consoling the unction with which God sweetens our acts of submission, they always involve the cross. But

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\* Canonically speaking, the Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Cross are not governed by a Rule but by Constitutions, which were given final approval by the Holy See in 1896. The book of commentary on the Constitutions which in the Holy Cross family has always been called the Rule was, however, written originally by Father Moreau himself, and for this reason it is especially dear to the members of the Community. The term "Rule" is therefore retained here and elsewhere in the meditations where Father Founder used it.

in the end they will lead us to sanctity by making us perfect disciples of our divine Master.

There is almost no sin which observance of the Rule cannot prevent, no fault it cannot correct, no virtue it does not make us practice. I am not afraid to say that no matter what good dispositions we acquire or renew during retreats, no matter what generous resolutions we make, if we are not determined to keep our Rule, all our painful efforts will be unsuccessful and unmeritorious, for they will be motivated and guided only by self-love and vanity. And, while the voluntary infraction of the Rule is not in itself even a venial sin, it may easily become sinful by reason of the circumstances accompanying it. But even if there were no sin involved, we should find a sufficient motive for keeping the Rule in the love of God and the graces attached to strict observance.

O my God, I do nothing that is unseen by You. I know that it pleases You to find me faithful to my duty and my Rule, when I have You alone as my witness. I shall endeavor in the future to perform my duties more perfectly when I am alone and unobserved, and to keep my Rule the more faithfully because it does not bind under pain of sin. Help me to show You this evidence of my love.

DECEMBER 31

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*The Last Day of the Year*



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“While we have time, let us do good” (Gal. 6:10).

Contemplate almighty God dwelling in motionless eternity, while

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all of time passes before His majesty with the swiftness of an impetuous torrent.

O my God, grant me the grace of profiting by the time that is given me.

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How rapidly the year has passed! The swiftness of its passing should remind us of the brevity of even the longest life and the emptiness of all that is earthly. A relatively short time remains for any of us if the portion of our life that is left be measured by the swift passage of the years that have gone by. Before You, O my God, the years are as nothing and all the centuries together are as an instant. Like wandering sparks which one sees darting about in the night air, we appear and vanish. But if our sojourn on this earth is so brief, why do we allow ourselves to become preoccupied with the fleeting and transitory things of sense? Let us work henceforward for spiritual goods, which alone are real and lasting.

Suppose that on this night, the last of the year, you were to hear the voice of the Master saying to you, "Render an account of the year which has just ended, of the graces you have received and the sins you have committed." As for the sins you have committed, they are indeed innumerable if, as the Holy Spirit tells us, *The just man falls seven times*, that is, an indefinite number. There may even be serious sins among them; but, in any case, your venial offenses are countless. How many sins of omission alone, does your conscience accuse you of! Time wasted, opportunities for doing good neglected, obligations evaded. Perhaps you have sinned consciously and deliberately many times; and doubtless you have offended even more often with a blurred awareness of your sin, more through frailty than malice. You sin through frailty whenever you

yield to impatience or self-complacency, when you entertain suspicions of others, or are hasty in judging others, when you give in to your moods, or allow unkind or injurious words to escape your lips, when you do not fight against distractions and do not properly guard your thoughts.

Such have been your offenses, in spite of all the graces you have received during the year; exceptional graces, perhaps, for which you may not even have expressed your gratitude to God. Think also of the trials God has sent you, in which you should have recognized His mercy and which you should have regarded as providential opportunities for growth in the spirit. Moreover, you have continued to be blessed with the great grace of perseverance in your vocation. You continue to live amid the very splendors of the sanctuary, where you enjoy daily access to inexhaustible sources of faith, hope, and love. Compare your privileged state with that of persons whom you know in the world and you will begin to realize how favored you are.

O my God, when at the foot of my crucifix I think over the year that has just ended, I experience sadness at the remembrance of my wasted moments. Some few returns of the new year and then the last day of my life! O God, let me so live this coming year as not to lose a single moment and thus make a careful preparation for the eternal years so soon to begin for me.

*The Circumcision of Our Savior*



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“And when eight days were fulfilled for his circumcision” (Lk. 2:21).

Witness in spirit this first shedding of the blood of the Son of Man, whereby He became a member of the Chosen People. O Jesus, help me to recognize my evil tendencies and overcome them.

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The Gospel of today's feast shows us the Infant Jesus submitting to the rite of circumcision. By this act He wished not only to conform to the Law, which came from God, but also to give new proof of the reality of His sacred humanity. Moreover, He thus certified, as it were, His descent according to the flesh from Abraham, upon whom God had imposed the performance of this rite as a sign in his flesh of the divine alliance contracted with him and his posterity. Had Jesus not submitted to this ceremony, the Jews could not have accepted Him as a true son of Abraham nor recognized Him as the Messiah. But our Savior's observance of the law of circumcision was not a mere formality. His act signified that He now ranked Himself with us sinners and that from this time forward He took upon Himself the iniquities of us all. He received this sign of ransom with the same infinite humility with which He would later submit to the baptism of penance at the hands of St. John the Baptist.

The circumstances of the institution of circumcision show that it represented a renewal of human nature, for when

God ordained it as a sign of His covenant with Abraham, He gave to him and his wife a new name and revealed that a son would be miraculously born to them in their old age. It was also a reminder of our defilement, for the rite implies that there are in human nature tendencies to evil which must be checked and redirected toward good, so that man may become a new creature, worthy of the divine alliance. Seen with the eyes of faith, circumcision takes on, therefore, a moral and symbolical character as well. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, *But he is a Jew who is so inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter.*

This circumcision of the heart, the casting off of the old man, we can accomplish only through the grace of the new Isaac, Jesus Christ, who regenerated all mankind through His passion and death. This circumcision of the New Covenant is made in the will. Its effect is the separating and detaching of our hearts from their irregular desires and from earthly affections, for the purpose of achieving union with God by total submission to His will. A holy old man, upon being asked where God is, answered, "Where we are not"; that is, the will of God and the love of God reign within us only to the extent that our self-love and self-will have been destroyed.

O my God, I offer You the precious blood of Your divine Son, shed for the first time on the day of His circumcision. Jesus, my Redeemer, grant me, on this great feast and this first day of the new year, the grace to begin in earnest to destroy the evil that is in me. Help me to grow in the spirit of expiation and to discipline myself strictly in atonement for my past sins.

## *The Holy Name of Jesus*



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“His name was called Jesus” (Lk. 2:21).

The sacred name of Jesus, that is, “Savior,” includes all the names that Holy Scripture gives to the Messiah. Jesus could not have offered infinite satisfaction to the offended majesty of God and so have become our Savior, if He had not Himself been God. Nor could He have been our Savior by meritorious suffering except by becoming man. All that Jesus did and suffered for us is summed up in His holy name.

O Jesus, let me taste the sweetness of Your name; may it be my hope, my consolation, and my strength.

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The name of Jesus is our hope. With this name as our protection what is there to fear? The punishment we deserve for sin? But in the name of Jesus Baptism took away from our souls the stain of original sin; and by the power of this holy name Penance cleanses us from the sins which continue to stain our souls. The thought of death? The name of Jesus sweetens even this thought by holding out to us the prospect of a better and everlasting life. The judgment of God? The name of Jesus is our pledge that the mercy of God pleads for our pardon with His justice, which demands our punishment. Or does temptation frighten us? Jesus Himself promised that the power of His name would drive out devils.

The name of Jesus is our consolation. It is *as oil poured out* upon the troubled heart. St. Bernard says, “An efficacious remedy for all ills . . . is enclosed in the name of Jesus as in a precious vase. There is no wound, no contagion,



whose perfect cure it does not effect. May it be always in your heart, may it be ever on your tongue, so as to govern all your thoughts, rule all your desires, and direct all your actions." Again he says, "The name of Jesus is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a shout of gladness in the heart."

In this sacred name we find also our strength, for it contains infinite virtue. Our Savior said, "*And these signs shall attend those who believe: in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak in new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall get well.*" These promises from the lips of Eternal Truth have often been fulfilled. We may recall as one example the cure of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, to whom St. Peter said, "*Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.*" Again, Jesus has assured us that whatever we ask the Father in His name will be granted us; and so the Church repeats the holy name at the close of all her prayers, asking all things of the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"O God, who didst appoint Thine only-begotten Son to be the Savior of mankind, and didst command His name to be called Jesus; mercifully grant that we may enjoy the vision of Him in heaven, whose holy name we venerate on earth. Through the same Christ our Lord" (Roman Missal).

*Holy Simeon*



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“Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples” (Lk. 2:29-31).

Picture the holy old man Simeon receiving the Infant Jesus into his arms.

Holy Simeon, obtain for me an habitual docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

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At His presentation in the Temple, the long-awaited Messiah solemnly ratified, at the place of all the sacrifices of the Old Law, the offering He had made of Himself at the first moment of His incarnation. So great an event should fittingly be signalized by a prodigy; and one was granted by the Eternal Father in welcome, as it were, to the Infant Jesus. The shepherds had been summoned by an angel and the Magi by a star, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. On this occasion, however, the Holy Spirit Himself sent a witness to the divine Babe.

There was living at that time in Jerusalem an old man whose name was Simeon. He had longed unceasingly for the coming of the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should not die before witnessing the rising of the Light of the world. At last his faith and hope were to receive their reward. As Mary, with the Infant in her arms, and St. Joseph ascended the steps of the Temple, Simeon felt interiorly the impulse of the Spirit of God. Immediately he left his house and went to the Temple,

the feebleness of old age forgotten in the ardor of his desire. In the porch of the house of God, among the many mothers who had come to present their children to the Lord, Simeon's inspired gaze recognized the Virgin of whom he had often read in the Book of Isaias; and pressing through the crowd he made his way to the Child she was holding in her arms. Mary, also guided by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the holy old man and placed in his trembling arms the Salvation of the world. Happy Simeon, figure of the ancient world, grown old in expectation and now nearing its end!

No sooner had he received the sweet Fruit of Mary's womb into his embrace than, filled with the need of bearing witness, like the shepherds and the Magi, Simeon gave utterance to his beautiful canticle, the *Nunc dimittis*. This hymn of thanksgiving for all the benefits and joys brought by the Day of Redemption has since become the evening prayer of the Church, just as it marked the evening of Simeon's day: "*Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light of revelation to the Gentiles and a glory to thy people Israel.*" Simeon's insight is deeper than Zachary's was. He proclaims a salvation prepared for all nations, not only for Israel.

"Adorn thy bride-chamber, O Sion, and receive Christ, thy King. Salute Mary, the Gate of heaven, for she bears the King of glory who is the new Light. The Virgin stands, bearing in her arms her Son, begotten before the daystar; him Simeon received into his embrace and proclaimed to the people as the Lord of life and death and the Savior of the world" (antiphon from the Greek liturgy).

## *The Prophecy of Simeon*



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“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted” (Lk. 2:34).

Imagine that you hear the holy old man Simeon prophesying to Mary and Joseph that enmities will gather about their Son.

Divine Savior, be for me *the resurrection and the life*.

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The portents are already clear even in the divine Babe of Bethlehem. Behold Him, our Lord and our God! He enters this world, not only poor, but destitute; not only humble, but in abject surroundings; not only mortified, but rigorously deprived of all material comforts. Could we find it in our hearts to accept, even to welcome, a similar lot? If interiorly we recoil from such extreme self-denial, then we do not as yet perfectly *mind the things of God*. And in proportion as we draw back from accepting and even desiring that which Jesus chose for Himself, He is for us as He has been for others *a stumbling stone and a rock of scandal*.

Simeon prophesied that the divine Child was *destined for the fall and for the rise of many*. Yet Jesus, as His name signifies, came to save. God wills the ruin of no one; He wills to save all men, but not in spite of themselves, nor without their co-operation. It was the whole future of the Church which Simeon beheld in prophetic vision, and his words proclaimed the awful mystery of the reprobation of the wicked. Before Jesus ever began His work the prophet declared that it would fail in part. The cross was to be the

signal for a combat that would extend over the whole earth and down all the centuries. Jesus crucified is the center of the whole history of the Church and of the world. The elect owe their salvation to Him; the lost are drawn to their ruin through not believing in Him or obeying His laws. To these latter the doctrines and miracles of our Savior, and especially the humiliations of His passion and death seem to be "hard sayings." Trusting only in their own strength, they despair of acquiring the meekness, humility, and self-abnegation taught and practiced by Christ; and their self-love then finds a refuge in denial and contradiction. Christ cannot be met with indifference; it is His destiny to lay open the secrets of the heart and reveal their good or evil dispositions. Before Christ crucified it is necessary to declare ourselves. Either we must choose to love Him with passionate devotion and zealously obey His laws, or we shall inevitably find ourselves in the camp of His enemies.

O Jesus, dear Babe of Bethlehem, destroy everything within me that is in the least degree opposed to You. Transform and fuse all my thoughts and aspirations into the single burning desire of union with You, of loving only that which You love, and of eagerly profiting by all inspirations that will bring me nearer to You.

JANUARY 5

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*The Obedience of Jesus to the Law*



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"They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord"  
(Lk. 2:22).

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The ceremony of the presentation of the first-born male in the Temple was prescribed by the Law in practical recognition of God's sovereign right of ownership over His people.

Divine Savior, help me to imitate You by my habitual fidelity to the observances of the religious life.

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Jesus obeyed the law of Moses with admirable exactitude. He was circumcised in accordance with the Law on precisely the eighth day after His birth, and on exactly the fortieth day, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple to present Him to the Lord. Later, He will also follow scrupulously the prescriptions for the eating of the paschal lamb. He obeyed these enactments because His Father had ordained them through Moses. Our divine Master wishes us to understand by His example of obedience in these matters, first, that nothing is trivial if it is God who prescribes it, whether directly or through one of His servants. The fact that it is His will makes every act important and worthy of reverence.

Second, He teaches us that our least actions become great when they are performed with great love; third, that, while the occasion for an externally important action rarely presents itself, little duties acquire importance by their very multiplicity and continuity. Finally, we learn from both the words and the example of Jesus that one who is faithful in small observances acquires the strength to be faithful also in greater ones. The continuous subjecting of oneself throughout a lifetime to the succession of small sacrifices which are implied by fidelity to the Rule requires great courage and ardent love.

"The least is the least," says St. Augustine, "but fidelity to the least is exceedingly great." The points of the Rule that may seem trifling are yet marked with the general seal and are, therefore, equally within the province of obedience.

Hence, to make the slightest retrenchment is to trespass on the rights of God. Strictly speaking, there are no trifling prescriptions in the Rule. The Rule is, in reality, the Church commanding us, and she makes no distinction of important and trivial observances in the rule of life adopted by her religious. It is the Church, the representative of God upon earth, that forbids us to keep anything in our possession without the Superior's permission. It is the Church that forbids us to be absent from or leave common exercises without the permission of the one presiding. It is the Church that warns us to safeguard religious modesty in the use we make of our eyes, in our conversations, in all our actions. It is the Church that prohibits too great familiarity among religious and too close attachments. It is the Church that bids us be friendly and courteous to all. Every point of rule, the least as well as the greatest, should, therefore, command our respect; and we should observe them all with equal care as the authentic will of heaven for us.

O my God, I resolve to obey the Rule of religious life that has been given me on Your behalf, whatever it may cost me. Confirm me in this good purpose with Your grace; direct my steps in the way of obedience, and make my observance of the Rule such that I may say at my last hour as did St. Aloysius, when he was dying, "I do not remember violating my Rule even once deliberately." Thus, I may hope to merit as he did the everlasting contemplation of You in paradise.

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*The Epiphany of Our Savior*



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“And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him. And opening their treasures they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11).

For us the feast of the Epiphany has almost exclusively as its object the manifestation of the Savior to the Gentile world in the persons of the Magi. But the Vesper hymn in today’s Office celebrates simultaneously the three Epiphanies of the Incarnate Word: His manifestation to the Magi from the East, the testimony to Him given by the Father and the Holy Spirit at His baptism in the Jordan, and the manifestation of His divinity by the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana.

O Jesus, grant that we who now know You by faith may come to behold the glory of Your majesty.

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Like the shepherds the Magi recognized their God in the Infant of Bethlehem. They were not disappointed nor taken aback by the poverty of the divine Babe; yet, to minds unenlightened by faith, could a greater disparity be imagined than that which separates a tiny child from the infinite God? The strong faith of these pagan seers was undoubtedly the reward of their immediate co-operation with grace. They had come in search of a king, but interiorly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they found their God, and immediately they fell down in adoration. The reward of our lifelong quest of Him, which God has reserved for us in heaven, infinitely surpasses the greatest happiness which we could imagine for



ourselves. Heaven is worth more than anything it could cost us to attain it, even were the price death by the cruelest martyrdom. But our heaven will be the more transcendently glorious according as we shall pay the more to win it.

As for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what a brilliant transformation the visit of the Magi must have brought about in their humble lodging! Even the brief account of it in St. Matthew's Gospel sheds over the infancy of Jesus something of the bright cloud of Tabor. In the silence, the obscurity, and the poverty of our Savior's infancy, there appear suddenly a brilliant star, a princely Oriental cortege, gold, incense, precious perfume. The poor dwelling of the Infant Jesus becomes a royal court. The essential meaning of the mystery of the Epiphany is in its testimony to the royalty of Jesus. The Magi implied this when they asked of Herod, "*Where is the newly born king of the Jews?*"; they showed it also in the gifts they brought. The gold was for their King, as the incense was for their God, and the myrrh for their Redeemer.

In the opinion of the Fathers the gifts of the Magi represented also the spirit of sacrifice: the sacrifice of love, of prayer, of renunciation. The holy Magi had given up everything—homeland, family, wealth, leisure. They had submitted their human reason to faith, they had surrendered their very hearts. And in what manner did they make these sacrifices? Promptly, eagerly, with generosity and patience, with the humble simplicity of children. "*We have seen his star . . . and have come.*" Yet the Magi never saw the kingdom of Jesus Christ come upon earth. We enjoy the blessing of seeing it in its full grandeur, power, and excellence. We are the privileged recipients of its unspeakable benefits. With the example of the Magi before us and the

thought of our blessings, how could we allow any sacrifice or difficulty to deter us in the service of Jesus Christ?

O holy Magi, help me to learn to know Jesus and Mary at the crib as you did. I too wish to offer gifts to the Babe of Bethlehem. Pray for me that I may bring to him, pure, intact, and enriched, the treasure I received in Baptism; that the gold I offer may have been coined only for Him and not to purchase earthly satisfactions; that my gift of incense may never have burned before an idol; and that the myrrh I bring may have become more precious through a lifelong spirit of sacrifice.

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JANUARY 7

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### *The Calling of the Magi*



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“There came Magi from the East to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the newly born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him’” (Mt. 2:2).

The Magi were learned men, well versed in astronomical and astrological lore. In the oldest paintings of the mystery of the Epiphany they are shown wearing crowns and other royal insignia. This tradition probably originated in the application to the Magi by certain Fathers of the Church of Ps. 71:10: *The Kings of Tharsis and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring tribute.*

O holy Magi, obtain for me selflessness and a spirit of faith like yours.

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The Mystery of the Epiphany represents the first accomplishment of the prophecy of Simeon: “*My eyes have seen*

*thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and a glory for thy people Israel.*" It is the feast of the calling of the Gentiles. Even from His crib Jesus summoned the nations to gather about Him. The Epiphany already teaches us something of the universality of the Redemption, a truth which St. Peter would have to learn many years later in the vision at Joppa. God did nothing to relieve the earthly poverty of His Son, but He did set in motion the angels and the stars in order to bring men of good will to the crib of Bethlehem. The Chosen People were represented there by the shepherds; the Gentiles, by the Magi. The mystery of the Epiphany should, therefore, be very dear to us, for it is a figure of our vocation to Christianity. The Magi were the first fruits of the Church of the Gentiles; in their wake all the nations have come to Christ by the royal road of the Cross.

The vocation of the Magi, is, furthermore, a great mystery of grace. Many others must have seen the star also, but they did not attempt to follow it. Doubtless, they found a hundred reasons for staying at home. Indolence has a natural ally in self-love, which persuades us to shun everything that is irksome and disagreeable. But the Magi responded to the interior motions of grace at the same time that they were studying the sign which God had sent them in the natural order. Oracles and prophecies had long been widespread throughout the East regarding the advent of the Messiah; and when the Magi observed the brilliant appearance of the new star in the heavens, they at once inferred that it was a sign of the Great King. They did not stop to discuss this extraordinary phenomenon, but prepared at once to follow its course.

This immediate response of theirs implies a most wonderful

spirit of faith and detachment. The Magi leave for a long and arduous journey to a distant land, abandoning their homes, their relatives, their leisurely and dignified mode of life, to go in quest of an unknown king, with no evidence for his existence other than the sudden appearance of an extraordinarily bright star. They also disregard the mocking comments which were certainly made with reference to their journey; nor are they at all disturbed by the hostile suspicions of Herod's court. Then, when they have accomplished their errand and are ready to return to their homes, they follow without question the advice of an angel, received during sleep, that they should return to their country by another road.

O Jesus, Light of the world, I thank You for extending Your mercies to all the nations of the earth. May all men soon come to know You and follow You as the Light which has risen for the whole human race. O holy Magi, intercede for me, that I may be led to the Eucharist today by a brighter light of faith, and that when I return to my duties, it may be *by another way*, that is, by a new manner of life, perfect in recollection, self-denial and love.

JANUARY 8

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### *The Star of the Magi*



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“Now they, having heard the king, went their way. And behold, the star that they had seen in the East went before them”  
(Mt. 2:9).

After their interview with Herod, God consoled the Magi with a fresh apparition of the star. They had *seen the star in the*

*East*, but the Gospel account in no way implies that the star had guided them to Jerusalem.

O Jesus, never let me be false to my duty, especially when faithfulness requires a sacrifice.

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Every happiness here below has its sorrowful morrow, which we shall be wise to expect. It is a law of nature that the flowers fall when the fruits come. God had sufficiently enlightened the Magi; He had started them on their way. Then, He withdrew His external assistance and apparently left them to themselves. By such trials God effects the necessary sifting of the courageous from the weak, the faithful from the faithless. The Magi, their duty having been once made clear to them, persevered steadfastly in their journey. The darkness which now surrounded them as they traveled through the nights did not cause them to forget that recently the star had shone upon them.

This is the ordinary condition of our lives: the going forward in the darkness of faith. Daily repetition tends to make our religious exercises wearisome. Even our reception of the sacraments becomes dull and spiritless at times. First fervor and the exuberance which attends beginnings inevitably flag, and a feeling of disillusionment is almost certain to sweep over us one day in our lives—when we discover that the reality is not the dream. Our periods of enthusiasm are the hours of the star, when we feel ourselves led, or almost carried along, by grace. Then, suddenly, the star of consolation disappears. Sometimes this happens through our own fault, but the withdrawal of consolation can also be a new grace, in that we are thus given fresh opportunities of practicing patience, humility, and gentleness; and of turning our wills toward God with all the greater trust and ardor.

Because they had met their trial with courage and patience, the Magi were rewarded. They had scarcely left Jerusalem when the star reappeared. The words of the Gospel account noting its return are like an outburst of joy: *And behold, the star that they had seen in the East went before them.* All fatigue and hardship forgotten, they hastened their steps and soon were in the presence of the King they had come to worship. To all appearances they had entered an ordinary house and found within an ordinary woman and child, but they prostrated themselves in adoration. Faith often leads us also to the unwelcome assignment, the hard or uninteresting work; but at such times there is only one attitude to take — that of the Magi. We, too, must interiorly fall down in worship and offer our gifts of faith, of hope, and of charity.

O Jesus, let my joy in You accompany me in all my journeyings and overflow into all I think and say and do. Never let me lose it through my own fault; and if it is Your will to withdraw Your sensible presence from me for my greater good, help me to practice the faith and courage of the Magi.

JANUARY 9

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### *The Flight Into Egypt*



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“Arise, and take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt”  
(Mt. 2:13).

After the departure of the Magi and before Herod could order the massacre of the Innocents, the Holy Family received the warning to flee into Egypt.

O Mary and Joseph, help me to learn from you how to increase in virtue and merit through trials and contradictions.

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The angel's order to St. Joseph was the occasion of another difficult trial for the Holy Family. St. Joseph had already undertaken more than one inconvenient journey, and now came the new command: "*Arise, and take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt.*" This journey into Egypt may have lasted a week or more and it was over desert country. When the Israelites had to travel through the desert on their return from captivity in Egypt, God sent to their aid the pillar of fire, the manna, the water miraculously drawn from a rock; but in the flight of the Holy Family we see none of these marvels. Nothing lessened the rigors of the journey for them. Still they obeyed patiently and without question. Yet, how many protests Joseph might reasonably have offered! If Herod was plotting the death of Jesus, could not the omnipotent God circumvent him and protect His Son as He had protected His Chosen People against Pharaoh and Sennacherib? If the flight was necessary, why to a distant place of exile like Egypt? Surely he should not expose the Mother and Child to so many dangers, fatigues, and uncertainties. None of these plausible and natural objections were raised, however, by Mary or Joseph; as soon as the angel had given the order they fulfilled it instantly and to the letter.

Thus began the accomplishment of the final words of Simeon's prophecy: "*And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" Already the secret thoughts of hearts were being disclosed — of the heart of Herod, full of malice, jealousy, and rage; and of the pure, resigned, loving hearts of Mary and Joseph,

leaving their home without a word, with no recriminations, pliant to all indications of the divine Will. We should bear in mind this secret law of our trials. God strikes us in order to open the hidden depths of our hearts, for there are some virtues that manifest themselves only when this secret door is violently forced.

As for our Savior Himself, He shows us in this mystery that He willed to be the victim of persecution from His earliest years. He willed to be the consolation of all exiles by experiencing in His own Person the pain of exile and of eating the bread of strangers. What a mystery of abasement! The Creator flees from His creature! God permits us to act freely, but our misuse of our freedom cannot effect any change in His eternal designs. On the contrary, His providence extends to the least actions of His creatures and directs them in the end to the perfect execution of His divine plan.

“What will happen to me today, O my God? I do not know. I know only that nothing will occur which You have not foreseen from all eternity. This suffices, my God, to make me tranquil. I adore Your eternal designs. I submit to them with all my heart. I desire all, I accept all, I make a sacrifice of all to You. This sacrifice I unite to that of Your dear Son, my Savior, begging You through His sacred heart and His infinite merits for patience in my trials and that perfect submission which is owing to You in all that You will or permit” (prayer recited in prison by Madame Elizabeth, sister of Louis XVI).



JANUARY 10

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*The Massacre of the Innocents*



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“Then Herod . . . sent, and slew all the boys in Bethlehem and all its neighborhood, who were two years or under, according to the time that he had carefully ascertained from the Magi” (Mt. 2:16).

Represent to yourself the death of these little children slain for Jesus’ sake, whom the Church calls by the beautiful name of “Flowers of the Martyrs.”

Sweet infant martyrs, obtain for me childlike simplicity of heart.

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Near the Lamb of God destined for sacrifice are other lambs already sacrificed. Why did God permit this carnage? He could have arrested the arm of Herod, just as He could crush the strength of all persecutors; but He did not do it. God has endowed man with free will, and He allows him to make use of it. But He inevitably draws good out of the evil use man makes of his liberty. Herod did not gain his end; and all the ugliness and ultimate futility of impiety is revealed in this cruel massacre. Jesus will die only at “His” hour and, even then, the grave will confine Him for only three days.

The Holy Innocents are made to sacrifice their lives, but in doing so they become witnesses to Christ. They bore witness to the Faith, not by speaking of it but by dying for it. St. Bernard characterizes their martyrdom by saying: “In St. Stephen we have both the act and the desire of martyrdom; in St. John we have only the desire; in the Holy Innocents

we have only the act." Yet, as an ancient preface beautifully says: "The splendor of the free grace of God outshone the martyrs' wills." They were regenerated by their baptism in their own blood. Through their martyrdom for Jesus' sake they are forever associated with the mysteries of the Holy Infancy. Nor will Jesus forget these children who died for Him. He will have a special love for little children and teach the world a new respect for them.

Personal merits on earth the Holy Innocents could not have, but neither did the defilements of the world ever touch them. At the very threshold of life they had already accomplished their mission. In an instant the sword took their life and their eyes were closed to this world—but only to open immediately to the contemplation of God for all eternity. One truth is strikingly taught in this mystery: that innocence itself must submit to the law of suffering and penitence. The Holy Innocents are immolated as victims of sacrifice, and so will the all-holy and innocent Savior offer Himself one day in a far more terrible death. Just as there is light wherever the sun sheds its rays, so Jesus acquaints with sorrow all who would draw near to Him. Yet none gain more nor lose less than they who surrender their lives and all they possess to Jesus. By contact with Him all that appears to be unhappiness, death, and ruin instantly becomes salvation, life, and joy. The purity of the Holy Innocents although untried was made meritorious by the blood they shed for the divine Lamb. In such innocence and simplicity did they receive their martyrs' palms and crowns that the Church says in her Vesper hymn honoring the Holy Innocents that they "play" with them. We, on the contrary must fight for our reward, and we are ever in danger of losing it; but simplicity of heart and purity will lead us to unreserved

confidence in God, and so to the perfect accomplishment of His holy will.

O Flowers of the Martyrs, pray for all the children in the world, especially those whom executioners more cruel than Herod deprive of the life of their soul. Pray also for me that I may bear my cross with patience and desire nothing but the accomplishment of the divine will. May I, like you, be meek and graceful in my trials, so that I may become worthy of sharing your glory for everlasting ages!

JANUARY 11

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*The Sojourn in Egypt and the Return*



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“And remain there until I tell thee” (Mt. 2:13).

The events of the life of the Holy Family in Egypt are not known to us. The duration of their exile has been estimated by some at a few months (it is probable that it lasted at least six months), while others prolong it to several years.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, grant me the grace of perfect abandonment to the will of God.

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We may assume that it was necessary for the Holy Family to earn their daily bread in Egypt; consequently, their life there must have been one of poverty and toil; but it was also a life of prayer and of sweet contentment and joy, because of their absolute confidence in God. There must have been other consolations also, since the Jews had numerous colonies in northern Egypt, and Joseph could, therefore, find friends and a livelihood among his own countrymen. But, above all,

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Jesus was there, growing daily in wisdom, grace, and age. It may have been in Egypt that He began to speak and walk; at all events, it was here, probably, that He put His little hands to their first tasks.

The gaze of the Infant Jesus must have rested upon the marvels of ancient Egypt: her great temples and pyramids; but His entrance into that country marked the beginning of the ruin of her false gods, as Isaias had foretold: *Behold the Lord . . . will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst thereof.* Perhaps we may see in this sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt the source of the abundant blessings which, later on, in the first centuries of the Church, caused Christianity and, in particular, the monastic life to flourish so marvelously throughout this region.

Finally, the angel reappeared to St. Joseph and told him he might now return to the land of Israel, because they who had sought the life of the divine Child were dead. How joyfully this message must have been received by the Holy Family! Yet it was a discreet and humble joy, out of deference to divine Providence, which had ordained the flight and the sojourn as well as the return. The angel had not indicated in precisely which part of the land of Israel Joseph was to establish his home. It seems to have been his intention at first to settle in Bethlehem; but, hearing that Archelaus, the cruelest of Herod's sons had succeeded his father as ruler of Judea, Joseph chose the town of Nazareth in Galilee. Here Jesus was to live for the remainder of His hidden life. The marvels of His public ministry tend to make us assign to these hidden years merely the value of a prelude. Yet, its duration and its meaning for us give to the hidden life a special importance. We need examples more than instruc-

tion; and not examples which we could never follow, but simple, ordinary ones, such as Jesus gave us at Nazareth during those years which have been rightly termed "the great school of the Christian life."

O Jesus, help me to be contented with the circumstances in which You have placed me, and yet be always disposed to obey readily any further manifestations of Your divine will. I resolve to abandon myself now and always to Your divine providence; for You have assured me that if I seek first Your kingdom and Your justice, all other goods will be added to me. Grant me the grace to keep my resolution.

JANUARY 12

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### *The Child Jesus in the Temple*



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"How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must needs be in my Father's House?" (Lk. 2:49.)

In these words, accompanied, surely, by an affectionate smile, Jesus reminds Mary and Joseph of His divine Sonship. "Why did you not know where to find me?" He says in effect: "Where would a child be but in his father's house?"

O Jesus grant me the grace of preferring to love and serve You, whatever may be the cost to my natural inclinations and desires.

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The three days' loss in the Temple is one of the deeper mysteries in the life of our Savior. In this incident we see Him permitting His parents to suffer an agony of worry and anxiety over His absence, while He shows Himself publicly, reveals His wisdom, and evokes admiration. All this is in

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striking contrast with the characteristics of the Hidden Life, in which obedience and profound humility are essential and predominant virtues. He had never behaved so to His parents before. With Mary and Joseph as with others Jesus had conducted Himself as a normal child. His divinity was to Mary and Joseph as to us an object not of vision but of faith.

What is the meaning of the words of Jesus on this occasion which, at the time they were spoken, was hidden even from Mary and Joseph; for they learned only gradually what His Messiasship involved? Our Savior wished by His answer to remind them and us that besides His Mother and His duties to her, He had a Father who was God and that His first duty was to obey the will of His Father and fulfill the mission confided to Him. Now, this will of the Father and this mission were the glory of the Father and the salvation of mankind by the revelation of the Son. *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me, to accomplish his work,"* Jesus will say later, in His public life; and again, *"For this is the will of my Father who sent me, that whoever beholds the Son, and believes in him, shall have everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

If, therefore, Jesus remained in Jerusalem, if He showed Himself in the Temple, it was because He willed to grant a new manifestation of Himself. The revelation of Jesus in this mystery is particularly important in that it was the first that He personally gave of Himself. Before, others had testified to Him: Elizabeth, the angels, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon; but here He testified to Himself. Again, the revelation was made in the presence of the official custodians of the Law, where Jesus was manifested as a Doctor even among the doctors. He was not seated among the auditors and disciples. The enraptured doctors gave Him a place in

their circle, a remarkable circumstance when one remembers the prestige enjoyed by the doctors of the Law at this time.

O Jesus, grant me the grace always to respond to You, when You will, as You will, where You will, with perfect readiness and generosity. Help me to understand Your answer to Mary and Joseph, so that I may regulate all my relations with others according to the love and submission I owe to You.

JANUARY 13

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*The Obedience of the Child Jesus to  
Mary and Joseph*



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“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them” (Lk. 2:51).

St. Luke states formally and even insistently that our Savior’s life during the hidden years at Nazareth was a life of obedience. Divine Savior, grant me the grace of always obeying meritoriously.

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The apocryphal writings abound in stories of the miraculous and wonderful events that filled the period of our Savior’s hidden life. The Gospel, however, speaks explicitly only of the obedience He practiced during this time. Evidently, we are to infer that during the long period of the hidden life, Jesus willed only to obey, and this with the most perfect submission. He obeyed the will of His parents exteriorly and interiorly, with the greatest promptness, joy, and graciousness, because Mary and Joseph held for Him the place of God. The esteem of the God-Man for obedience

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and the attachment of His whole soul to it, as it were, was surely the great marvel of His life; and the wonder of it is summed up in the words, He *was subject to them*.

For who is it whom we contemplate in this life of dependence? It is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Master of the universe, whom all creation obeys and before whom the angelic hosts tremble with awe. Assuredly, neither Mary nor Joseph possessed wisdom and virtue equal to His, but they held the place of His Father. Moreover, He obeyed them not only with full submission, but in all things without exception, in quite unimportant matters for the most part. As a child He helped His Mother in the care of their home, and then as He grew older He assisted St. Joseph in his trade of carpentry.

Obedience is the law of life from which no one is exempt. We may change our masters and substitute usurpers for legitimate rulers. We may become slaves of our feelings and whims, under the delusion that we are liberating ourselves, but always and everywhere we obey. It was to teach us to obey well that Jesus set us an example of thirty years' duration. This was not time lost, since He was giving us the most useful of lessons. During the period of youth and vigor, when men are most tempted by desires of independence, Jesus made it His glory to live in submission. Obedience is a very special, a unique, source of merit. For when in all things we see God and in all things obey God, out of love, we perform our actions in the most meritorious way possible. The material value of the act is of little consequence. Actions that are performed at God's command and for love of Him are, in reality, the only great actions. The most humble lives, if they are lived in obedience, are sublime. By the least of His actions in Nazareth Jesus could have accomplished our



redemption as truly as by His death on the cross; for that which constituted the merit of those acts as well as of His death was the fact that God willed them.

“O Lord God, King of heaven and earth, may it please Thee this day to hallow, rule, and govern our hearts and our bodies, our thoughts, our words, and our works, according to Thy law and in the doing of Thy commandments, that we, being helped by Thee, may here and hereafter worthily be saved and delivered by Thee, O Savior of the world, who livest and reignest for ever and ever” (Roman Breviary).

JANUARY 14

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*Growth in Wisdom, Age, and Grace*



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“And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Lk. 2:52).

In Jesus we distinguish divine wisdom which could not increase, but which was manifested in Him more and more as He advanced in age; supernatural wisdom, which increased as His merits increased before God; and natural wisdom, which developed in the normal human way through the acquisition of experimental knowledge. Jesus advanced in grace by manifesting ever greater effects of the grace that was in Him.

○ Jesus, grant that I may reach the degree of perfection You will for me.

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Except for His natural wisdom, the progress of the Child Jesus in knowledge had to do with His exterior development, in the sense that our Savior revealed outwardly, according

as He advanced in years, the wisdom that was within Him. He adapted the manifestation of His higher knowledge to the progress of His acquired knowledge. Jesus not only grew thus in wisdom, but He also manifested more and more the sanctity within Him, so that His sacred humanity became externally more and more pleasing to God and men. There was nothing in heaven or on earth that gave God more glory or that was more pleasing in His sight than Jesus His Son living in the silence and obscurity of Nazareth.

The mind of Jesus had no thought apart from God His Father, to whose glory He referred His whole mission in this world. He had no judgments on men and events other than those of the Father, for He said of Himself, "*The things, therefore, that I speak, I speak as the Father has bidden me.*" The soul of Jesus thus absorbed in promoting the Father's glory and doing His will was the sanctuary of all virtues, wherein dwelt *the fullness of the Godhead bodily*. "He was sovereignly beautiful," says St. Augustine, speaking of the interior beauty of Jesus, "in all the stages of His life: beautiful in Mary's womb, beautiful in His parents' arms, beautiful in His miracles, beautiful on the cross and in death, beautiful in the tomb and in His resurrection."

And as the soul of Jesus gained more and more the favor of God, so His exterior aspect and conduct mirrored faithfully the progress of His soul. On His countenance was reflected majesty full of sweetness. When He spoke, all men of good will were struck by the words of grace and wisdom that fell from His lips. There was the greatest recollection, modesty, and captivating charm in His whole person. Although He spent most of His time with men of coarse manners, He was ever courteous, charitable, humble, and grateful, ever considerate and helpful, especially toward His

Apostles. He instructed them with patience and reproved them with gentle firmness. And in the work of His apostolate, what tenderness and compassion He showed for the poor, the sick and afflicted, the children! Jesus Christ is our Model. Let us try to conform ourselves to Him in body and soul. Thus we shall realize the aim of our holy vocation and also win others to Christ by making virtue attractive to them. We should ask this grace for all the members of our Congregation through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, the two perfect imitators of Jesus.

I adore You, O Jesus, in all the stages of Your growth. I adore the lowliness to which You reduced Yourself for love of us. I ask the grace of advancing in all Your virtues before God and men. Above all, grant me a heart like Yours. My heart does not know how to love; it is not distressed at the thought of men's ingratitude to You and of its own sins. Change it, good Jesus, and make it worthy of You, meek, humble, zealous, loving like Yours.

JANUARY 15

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*St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family*



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“When Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found, before they came together, to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:18).

The betrothal of Mary and Joseph was a true alliance. By it Joseph became before the law the father of our Savior, and Mary was given a protector and spouse of her virginity.

St. Joseph, dear guardian of Mary, obtain for me the grace of perfect fidelity to my vocation.

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The vocation of St. Joseph was to be, according to the law, the father of our Savior. This was his special role and at the same time his most glorious title. To bear the responsibility of clothing and feeding the Incarnate God was an unspeakable privilege for a mortal man. It must have been a spectacle to create envy in the celestial court to see the God before whose throne they trembled as they adored, sitting and eating at a poor table on earth between Mary and Joseph. One cannot even feebly conceive of those meals. One cannot begin to imagine the conversations that were the outward manifestation of the admirable accord, the ravishing union of hearts in this visible created trinity.

But the vocation of St. Joseph required great fidelity and complete self-abnegation. St. Joseph was and remains the saint of the Holy Infancy; and this infancy of Jesus was for him the occasion often of great pain and weariness. It brought upon him much persecution and very little honor from the world. His role was to veil before the eyes of men the great mystery of divine omnipotence. No ray of the glory of our Savior's public life illumined those years spent in the obscurity of Nazareth. But by the great heart of St. Joseph all the privations, hardships, and labors of his life were welcomed with the most ardent love. We could never comprehend the love that was in the heart of Joseph for Jesus and Mary. The heavenly Father of whom St. Joseph was the earthly representative had imparted to him something of His own love for His Son and for Mary. Some spiritual writers have even affirmed that St. Joseph died consumed by the very ardor of his love.

Let us thank St. Joseph for the good example he has given us of fidelity to our vocation and for his faithful care of Jesus and Mary. His mission itself should strengthen our

trust in him. He was appointed to be a father, and in his virtues—calm strength, faithfulness, self-forgetting love—we see the perfect expression of fatherliness. Like Jesus and Mary we can safely entrust all our cares to St. Joseph. Whatever he takes under his protection will surely receive the blessing of God, for has not God Himself placed St. Joseph over His whole earthly kingdom by making him Protector of the universal Church? Furthermore, we of the Congregation of the Holy Cross should go to Joseph with exceptional confidence and filial love, since he is the special patron of our beloved community.

O chaste Spouse of the Virgin Mary and Foster Father of my Savior, with fullest confidence I invoke you on behalf of the priests, brothers, and sisters, who have the honor of belonging to a community of which you are the honored protector. Make us more worthy of you, of your divine Son, and of our own high vocation. I implore, also, for the young who are placed in our care the grace to imitate your spotless purity and perfect obedience. Be always our defender and father; and when the moment of death comes, when our souls are about to quit the body, show yourself to us, O St. Joseph, as our advocate before our Judge, and refresh our dying eyes with your dear presence.

JANUARY 16

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*Jesus, the Laborer*



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“Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Mt. 13:55)

The hidden life of our Savior was also a life of humble obscurity and toil.

O Jesus help me to make my values conformable to yours.

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God loved the Holy Family more than anything else in heaven or on earth, but He did not exempt its members from labor and anxiety. Providence kept a special watch over the little house of Nazareth, but its inhabitants were not spared their difficulties and hardships. They were not fed by a raven, as the prophet Eliseus had been. Joseph had to work for their daily bread and, after his death, Jesus earned a livelihood for His Mother and Himself by following His foster father's trade. He knew the feeling of weariness after a day's labor; He knew what it was to earn one's bread in the sweat of one's brow. Moreover, as a poor laboring man, He was exposed also to the treatment that is commonly given the lowly and the poor. What a spectacle to the eyes of faith is the poverty and obscurity of the Word made flesh! The world went on as usual with its business. The Roman empire was extending and fortifying its boundaries; great battles were being waged, powerful alliances contracted; famous orators and poets were winning world-wide acclaim, and the Incarnate Son of the true God took no part in it all. Yet it was as a preparation for the spread of His Gospel and the world-wide establishment of His Church that all these spectacular events were taking place.

To all whose lot it is to work at humble tasks, Jesus has shown the value of these obscure duties; nor should we forget that it was in these lowly circumstances that He advanced in wisdom and grace. The hidden life is a great school of Christian progress. While in Jesus this progress was part of the mystery of the God-Man, infinitely perfect from His conception, in us it will truly lead to sanctity if we imitate the obedient and laborious life that Jesus led. The example of the Savior makes of work, even the humblest and most ordinary work, a source of spiritual progress in

time and of success in eternity. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why Jesus willed to pass so many years in obscurity, labor, and obedience. This was a more important work than to go about the world preaching the Gospel; He first had to practice the Gospel — in His hidden life — which He was one day to preach. Human pride will never understand such a life and, consequently, will never understand Jesus. We contemplate at Nazareth Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, busy at their daily tasks and seeming to have no other horizon and ideal except the duties of their state. Our vocation is to relive the life of the Holy Family on earth and to manifest to the world the love and devotedness of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. To what marvels of sanctity our community would give rise if we could succeed in reproducing the life of Jesus Christ, especially His hidden life at Nazareth, which was so rich in lessons for us!

Divine Master, teach me to pray and work and take my rest, all in the dispositions that were Yours during Your life on earth. Help me to be contented and at peace wherever Your providence places me and whatever work You give me to do. Make me understand that the value of my labors is in the spirit and intention with which I accomplish them. Grant me the grace, O Jesus, of imitating You in this life, that I may share Your felicity for all eternity.

*The Interior Life of Mary*



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“And his mother kept all these things carefully in her heart”  
(Lk. 2:51).

The *things* that Mary kept in her heart were all the marvelous events of our Lord’s life. Her role in the holy infancy and the hidden life was twofold. As His Mother she served our Savior and cared for His needs; as His creature she adored her God and contemplated His infinite perfections.

Mother Mary, help me to grow in the interior life.

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The Gospel sums up the infancy and childhood of our Savior in a few lines; yet, in reality, the Incarnation, the expectation of the birth of Jesus, the care of His needs as Child, Youth, and Man covered months and years. Mary was everything to Jesus; she fed Him, clothed Him, and in His infancy lulled Him to sleep on her breast. She was His constant companion and, since we may rightly suppose that God placed in the heart of Mary all the love and tenderness that humanity owed the Savior, her adoring and devoted care of Him is to be reverently contemplated rather than understood. But even more precious than her external role was Mary’s interior mission of spiritual participation in the mysteries of the holy infancy and the hidden life. Mary followed the course of these mysteries intently; she impressed deeply upon her memory, understanding, and heart all their outward circumstances. There is nothing more open to all impressions touching her child nor more retentive of these



impressions than the heart of a mother. And the heart of this Mother? Could these mysteries have been more fully and surely preserved or with a more accurate and living remembrance than in Mary's heart? Always she found new delights as she pondered them and compared them with one another, striving to sound their mysterious depths and measure their sublime heights.

Ever present to her gaze, living before her eyes was the One who formed the constant object of her thoughts. Nothing concerning Him escaped her attention. Our Lady knew that no least detail of our Savior's life could be termed insignificant. Everything in Him was divine: each footstep, each breath, each slightest movement or thought was worthy of the adoration of angels and men. In the divine face Mary contemplated the charms of infancy, the grace of youth, the serious calm of manhood. In every fleeting expression she discerned the mystery of God, the divinity in the humanity, the infinite and eternal in time, omnipotence and majesty in weakness and need. And as she followed the progress of Jesus' growth, what joy for Mary to observe how He resembled her in His facial features, in His whole appearance, even in His manner!

With regard to herself, each word, gesture, and look of the Savior was for Mary a new advance in holiness and purity. It is certain that in spending so many years in Nazareth Jesus willed among other things to advance the perfection of His holy Mother, and justly so. Mary is the noblest and highest among creatures and the good seed in her always yielded a hundredfold. What power, what riches of holiness must there have been for Mary in the daily glances, the sweet conversations, the numberless attentions, and the constant care she lavished upon Jesus during thirty

years! Had our Savior during His sojourn on earth done nothing else except sanctify His Mother, the stupendous grandeur of her holiness would have amply justified His coming.

O Mary, I venerate you for the high sanctity to which you were raised in being intimately associated with Jesus throughout so many years, and from my heart I thank you for all you did for Him and for us during His infancy and hidden life. Help me to imitate you in meditating upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Move my will as I ponder them, so that both interiorly and exteriorly I may become more and more like you.

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JANUARY 18

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*Jesus, Our Hidden God*



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“Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Savior”  
(Isa. 45:15).

Not only at Nazareth, but throughout His earthly life, Jesus was  
*a hidden God.*

Divine Savior, teach me how to live hidden in God with You.

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The God of glory, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, concealed Himself, first, under the veil of human nature. Then, He hid Himself in the womb of the Virgin Mary, covering the miracle of His conception by a most holy marriage. His presence was made known to John the Baptist in his mother’s womb, not directly, but through the salutation of Mary. Except for the shepherds who adored Him in the stable-cave of Bethlehem, the whole world

ignored His birth. His childhood also was passed in obscurity. Ordinarily the education received by illustrious persons is known in some detail; but of Jesus only one comment is recorded: "*How does this man come by learning, since he has not studied?*" During the period of His childhood, He was seen only once in public, in the midst of the doctors of the Law, when He was twelve years old; but still the Gospel does not say that He taught. He listened, He asked questions, as a boy properly should; *and all who were listening to him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* Then, after this brief flash of the light of His wisdom, He retired again, as the sun behind a cloud, into voluntary obscurity so profound that His fellow countrymen knew nothing more remarkable of Him than that He was a carpenter's son and the child of Mary. Nathanael, who lived at Cana, only a few miles from Nazareth, appears not to have heard of Jesus before being introduced to Him by Philip.

Jesus continued to be hidden even during His public life. Although He was the Light of the world, the world, always hostile to light which reveals its wickedness, hastened to obscure the Sun of Justice by the black vapors of calumny. Amid the very prodigies that revealed His divinity, Jesus remained still *a hidden God*. "He is a prophet," said some. "He is a deceiver"; "He is the Christ"; "He is not the Christ"; "He is not of God, because He performs miracles on the Sabbath"; "He is a Samaritan and a blasphemer"; "He is possessed by a devil." And never was the Savior of the world more hidden than in His "hour." Then was He truly *the last of men, a worm and no man*. At the end, as if God were no longer His Father, He cried out, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Then He was covered by the shadows of death and concealed in the tomb. After

His resurrection, He showed Himself secretly and as if in passing, not to His enemies, whose confusion at the apparition would have sealed His triumph, but to the holy women and the Apostles and disciples. Finally, a cloud took Him from their sight and from then on He has remained hidden in our tabernacles where His presence will continue until the end of time. There He must frequently endure blasphemy and indifference, but His lightnings do not flash out; He does not make us feel His power.

O Jesus, help me to seek and desire always and everywhere to live *hidden in God* with You. Grant me the grace to bear misunderstanding and contempt with patience and even with joy, for love of You and in order that I may imitate You more closely.

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JANUARY 19

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### *The Little Virtues*



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“This indeed is the smallest of all the seeds; but when it grows up it is larger than any herb and becomes a tree” (Mt. 13:32). In the parable of the mustard seed, our Savior teaches us the secret of spiritual progress.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of understanding the importance of fidelity in little things.

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Fidelity to small duties prepares us for great virtues. Such faithfulness is itself a great virtue. “*He who is faithful in a very little thing,*” says our Savior, “*is faithful also in much.*” How is this true? In the sense that God grants us an

increase of His help in proportion to our zeal in pleasing Him by the perfect fulfillment of small obligations. Grace becoming more abundant, courage also is increased; and courage, supported by watchfulness and fervor, conducts us to heroic virtue. How splendid is the prospect thus opened before the religious soul! If all of her life is an uninterrupted succession of acts of fidelity, then all of her life will be growth in merit; and in the course even of several years consecrated to such faithful observance, what a store, what an abundance of merits will she not have acquired for her eternal glory! God never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity. The more exact we are in accomplishing His will, even in very small matters, the more lavish He is with His favors. No action performed to please Him alone ever fails to receive its reward of added grace; and each grace draws after it a greater one, which, being received with profit, merits another. Thus, from day to day, even from moment to moment, fidelity causes grace to increase.

Then, indeed, shall we go *from strength to strength*. The prompt, constant, and universal fidelity to what is prescribed daily, monthly, and yearly will make of us so many victims of pure love, so many living hosts; and how I would bless the divine mercy for this! Our progress will be the more rapid as grace increases our courage. Think of the heroic constancy of the martyrs, who laughed at the cruelty of tyrants and scorned the fury of their persecutors. Some of them even ran to meet suffering and death with ardent desire. Whence came their indomitable courage? Assuredly, it was not their first exercise of virtue. A thousand lesser victories won over themselves had prepared them for their final triumph. They knew that they would have tempted God in offering themselves to torture before they were ready;

they knew that it would have been blind presumption to aspire to the title of "martyr" before they had worthily born that of "Christian."

O Jesus, help me to understand the value in Your sight of worthy attention to the duties of every moment. Let me see Your will in the least points of Rule and in the smallest prescriptions of my Superiors; and deign to grant me the strength I need to persevere in the faithful observance of them.

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JANUARY 20

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*Advantages in the Little Virtues*



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"He has done all things well" (Mk. 7:37).

Contemplate Jesus practicing the virtues of mortification, humility, and charity in His hidden life.

Divine Savior, help me to perform all my actions, even the least, in union with Your dispositions during Your life on earth.

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The advantages of virtue practiced in ordinary actions over that exercised in more striking ones comes from the fact that the former usually require a more constant mortification, a more solid humility, and purer charity. The occasions of practicing virtue on the more spectacular levels rarely present themselves. To be stripped of one's possessions, to sacrifice oneself for an enemy, to confess Christ in the face of persecution are not actions of every day. But one can always perform the duty of the present moment purely for God.

One can always bear with a neighbor's faults and adapt oneself to a difficult temperament, or avoid speaking ill of

others and good of oneself. We are frequently in a position to forgive those who have offended us and to render service to persons for whom we feel no natural attraction. Often we have occasion to refrain from causing others to suffer on our account, or to bear in silence and in a spirit of penance physical pain or discomfort, to endure without complaint any contradiction or unpleasantness associated with our work, to reply kindly to those who ask indiscreet or offensive questions, to receive the rejection of our help with gentleness and a favor with gratitude. We are always able to hold a low opinion of ourselves, to yield gladly to our inferiors, to renounce our own views, plans, even our own judgments, desires, affections, repugnances; to give up comfort, satisfaction, sensuality—in a word, we can, at any moment renounce self. But all this implies great mortification.

In the virtuous performance of small actions there is also a more solid humility, for the desire of notice and esteem are almost always present in the performance of conspicuous deeds. Then too, there is the hidden snare of being secretly convinced of one's own merit, or of cherishing an inner complacency in one's allegedly superior qualities. But in the case of the little virtues, presumption and vanity have no place, since small actions pass without acclaim and have only limited worth when taken singly or in themselves. Again, in the performance of great actions we are powerfully stimulated by the circumstances, which excite us and raise us above ourselves, so that exceptional force is thereby imparted to the will. But in the common ordinary duties there is no external stimulation and, consequently, our natural cravings do not find satisfaction in them. Grace alone moves us to act and only the love of God keeps us faithful.

O my God, I humbly promise to repair by great exactitude all my

past infidelities, that I may one day hear from Your lips the blessed words: "Good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful in little things, I will place you over greater ones. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

JANUARY 21

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*Progress Through the Little Virtues*



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"They go from strength to strength" (Ps. 83:8).

The practice of virtue in small matters can lead to eminent virtue; besides, it is more likely to be motivated by a pure intention than virtue exercised in works of greater exterior importance.

O Jesus, enlighten me by Your grace that I may recognize my negligence.

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In the natural order the union of a thousand harmonious details produces the perfect work. In the order of grace, likewise, the assemblage of numberless tiny acts of virtue can result in consummate holiness. The merit of the valiant woman described in the Book of Proverbs consists chiefly in the care and attention with which she fulfilled her ordinary domestic duties. The august Virgin Mary herself arrived at the plenitude of perfection by performing countless small acts of ordinary virtue, if one considers them only in themselves; yet their accumulation raised her to the highest sanctity. One who makes it a rule never to be careless in the service of God is thereby preserved from many illusions and errors. The suggestions of pride and self-love find her ever on guard and nothing escapes her notice, because she has accustomed



herself to consider even her least duties important. On the other hand, the scorn or neglect of little things exposes one to serious falls. No one, St. Bernard tells us, becomes wicked all at once. At first there is relaxation in matters seemingly of little importance; then fervor cools; and at length the soul is attacked by a strong temptation and succumbs. Judas would never have sold his Master if he had resisted his passions in their beginnings. The world may be amused at our attention to apparent trifles—the world which makes so much of small improprieties in matters of etiquette—but let us continue to apply ourselves to serving with meticulous care the good God who is so magnificent in His rewards.

The motive which is likely to prompt such fidelity, moreover, is the highest and most meritorious that can be had; for where less satisfaction is offered to self-love, the intention of pleasing God and of showing Him love and reverence will ordinarily be paramount. “If there is anything great outside of God,” remarks St. Basil, “is it not that which is done for Him?” The intention is the life and soul of our actions; their worth before God is measured by the purity of intention with which we perform them. This truth should be most comforting to souls who live hidden and obscure lives, unknown to the world. Yet, too often we forget it and we tend to judge from appearances. We term unimportant actions which may be very great in the eyes of faith; and through the same error in judgment we proclaim as great and heroic that which is, too often, only the expression of pride and ambition. Let us bear in mind that all is lost for heaven which is not done for God; the most vaunted work, if purity of intention is lacking, does not equal the smallest action done solely for God.

“Most Holy Trinity, Godhead indivisible, Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit, our first beginning and our last end, since You have made us after Your own image and likeness, grant that all the thoughts of our minds, all the words of our tongues, all the affections of our hearts, and all our actions may be always conformed to Your holy will; to the end that after having seen You here below in appearance and in a dark manner by the means of faith, we may come at last to contemplate You face-to-face in the perfect possession of You forever in paradise” (*Raccolta*).

JANUARY 22

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### *Purity of Intention*



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“Take heed not to practise your good before men, in order to be seen by them; otherwise you shall have no reward with your Father in heaven” (Mt. 6:1).

In the second section of the Sermon on the Mount, our Savior teaches that good works must be done to please God alone and not to attract the attention of men.

Good Jesus, deliver me entirely from the spirit of vainglory.

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The germ of vainglory is in all men; the least favorable opportunity develops it and there is no one of us in whom its pernicious roots do not extend more or less, or in whom its bitter fruits do not easily spring up. No greater service could be done our community than that this universal malady be cured and our members raised forever beyond the suggestions of self-love. So I say to you, my dearly beloved, as I have often said to myself, with all the zeal I have for our happiness in eternity, *Let us not become desirous of*

*vainglory*. Let us not seek after the esteem of men, but, with the assistance of divine grace, root out from our nature, so corrupted by sin, that absurd attachment to praise, that eagerness to curry favor with human judgment. Let us courageously combat this passion, which, by making us lose the merit of our works, paralyzes our ministry among others.

This passion more common, more dangerous, and more frivolous than any other, God has reproved by His express word, by the example of His Son, and by the example of all the saints. The teaching of the Gospel is explicit: "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*"; but, on the contrary, "*Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake.*" St. Bernard says that either it was folly for the Son of God to choose to be the object of opprobrium and contempt, or it is folly for us to seek after human esteem. The Jews were scandalized by Christ's conduct and the Gentiles took it for madness, but it was in reality the wisdom and virtue of God. Mary, the Queen of all the saints, the royal daughter of Juda, was content to remain always in obscurity. St. Paul was a Roman citizen and a man of learning, but in the true Christian spirit he wrote, *If I were still trying to please men, I should not be a servant of Christ*. The Apostles left the court of the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. After the Apostles came the martyrs in their thousands, who joyfully suffered the loss of their lives and reputations on this earth, in the belief that they began to be true disciples of Christ when they were humiliated and despised. Then came the solitaries, who concealed the holiness of their lives in deserts and mountain fastnesses; finally, the other saints, of every age and con-

dition, who so feared human esteem as a danger to their humility that they were dismayed when surprised in some action which would lead others to suspect their holiness.

When we see what our Lord Jesus Christ, His holy Mother, the Apostles, and all the saints thought of worldly praise, dare we call ourselves their imitators — we who experience so sweet a feeling when someone gives us honorable mention; we who know so well how to keep that silence which makes pass for true the false praise given us; we who are so quick to excuse ourselves when we are wrongly blamed and who cannot be reproached for the least fault without making reply; we who have such a horror of humiliations, although they are the greatest grace God can give us and the sole means of curing our pride.

O divine Master, grant me the grace not to lose my interior peace when others speak ill of me, whether truly or not. Let me learn to value only what You, my Sovereign Judge, see and approve in me. Then shall the work of my apostolate become really fruitful; because, as Your great servant St. Augustine has said, the more we are emptied of self, the more we are filled with grace, and so the more capable of promoting Your glory and the salvation of souls.

JANUARY 23

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*The Pearl of Evangelical Holiness*



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“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds a single pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it” (Mt. 13:45, 46).

Our Savior here exhorts us to seek and find the pearl of great price which is religious perfection.

Divine Savior, fill me with an efficacious desire to surrender all, that I may purchase the pearl of sanctity.

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The value of pearls arises chiefly from their solidity, the unalterable quality of their form, their beauty of sheen and texture. These features well represent the goal of the religious life, which is perfection according to the evangelical counsels. This perfection, like the pearl, is complete and immutable, solid and flawlessly beautiful. Moreover, what our Savior tells us about the acquisition of the pearl in the parable suits admirably the choice and the practice of the religious state. In the preceding parable recorded by St. Matthew, of the treasure hidden in the field, we are not told how the man who found the treasure happened to discover it; but in the case of the pearl Jesus expressly states that the merchant was *in search of fine pearls*. It is an easier matter, indeed, to seek for and to estimate the value of golden treasure than to recognize and properly evaluate fine pearls; for this one must be a specialist, a connoisseur. Likewise, in order to appraise rightly the pearl of evangelical perfection, one must have more light, a keener supernatural sensibility, than is required for the recognition in general of the truths of the Gospel and the Church. Again, a greater force of will and firmer decision are needed to bind oneself to the observance of the counsels than to the keeping of the commandments alone.

Our Savior then tells us that the merchant, having found *a single pearl of great price*, sold all that he possessed in order to buy it. This feature of the parable also bears a special relation to a religious vocation. The necessary condition for

entering upon the life of the counsels is an effective renunciation of all that we possess, of all our goods; that is, our external possessions by poverty, the goods and pleasures of the body by chastity, and our natural interior possessions, the faculties of the soul, by obedience. But perhaps since the time that we solemnly chose the Savior as our portion and left all to follow Him, we have gradually reclaimed some of our goods: the love of our own ease and of our reputation, for example; or any of the thousand satisfactions craved by self-love and egoism. Our transaction may still be incomplete; perhaps we are in effect renegeing on our original bargain whereby we contracted to pay for this jewel with a complete, not a partial, despoiling of self, by absolute poverty, and by humiliation not only accepted but welcomed.

The evangelical pearl is worth all the sacrifices we could make and far more. We know this, we believe it, but we hesitate before such an exchange. Sometimes, however, God intervenes. In order to force us to purchase His love, He may Himself despoil us of all else. By great trials He may bring us to an understanding of the mystery, the folly, of the cross. Left to ourselves we would shrink from buying the precious pearl, since to obtain it one must give up all. We suffer at first from this force of divine love and we submit to it, perhaps, with tears. So many trials, such a heavy cross, so much deprivation! We may even ask God to spare us anything more; but the day will come when we shall appreciate our good fortune and then how we shall thank God for having enriched us in spite of ourselves!

O my Savior, I thank You profoundly for inspiring me to set out in search of the precious pearl of evangelical holiness by entering the religious state. Happy should I be if, like the merchant in Your parable, I were to desire this pearl ardently enough to

sell all that is mine, all that belongs to self, in order to buy it. Help me to approach nearer every day to the perfection of my state, that finally I may really come to possess the incomparable pearl of sanctity.

JANUARY 24

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*Exclusive Service*



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“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:24).

Our Savior here teaches us that we cannot rise toward Him until we have freed our hearts from the love and service of mammon; that is, from worldly riches and all the other perishable goods of this life.

Lord Jesus, help me to understand better the meaning of total consecration to Your service.

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God is our true Master; He is our Beginning and our End; He is our Creator and Redeemer, infinitely good in Himself and infinitely good to us. We came into this world for no other purpose than to serve Him. As religious we have in addition voluntarily bound ourselves by vow to the exclusive and total service of God and to the practical renunciation of the world and the spirit of the world. No one serves the devil for love of the devil; but this enemy of our salvation uses the mammon of this world and the allurements of the flesh to draw souls little by little into his

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service and away from God. On countless occasions the alternatives are presented to us; both masters we cannot serve, for they are absolutely opposed to each other. We must choose, and it is this necessity of choice which often disquiets us. We should like to reconcile the service of God with certain easy compromises with our triple enemy: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Without committing oneself to an outright yielding to temptation one can distribute one's service in several directions, legitimate ones, perhaps, but not really leading to the exclusive service of God which is expressed by the vows of religion. *The unmarried woman, and the virgin*, wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, *thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and spirit*. The virginal soul who belongs exclusively to God should think only of pleasing Him. She may not content herself with saying "God before all and more than all"; for her the constant cry of the heart must be "God alone!" She must strive to know and serve only one Master and aspire to the enviable poverty of an exclusive love. This is her lifelong work; preservation from a divided allegiance is not secured at once by the oblation of religious profession. The devil disputes with God even the souls of the saints. Judas was among our Savior's constant companions, but even then he was serving another master, to whom finally he sacrificed Jesus. This master was his passions. Our Savior's warning, therefore, is meant for all, for those following the way of the counsels as well as for Christians living in the world. It is only by continual struggle against self and its inordinate cravings that we as religious will be able to deny our allegiance habitually to all other masters and offer it purely and exclusively to God. "Receive, O Lord, all my liberty. Take my memory, my under-



standing, and my entire will. Whatsoever I have or hold, You have given it; I give it all back to You and commit it wholly to be governed by Your will. Your love and Your grace give to me, and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more" (St. Ignatius Loyola).

JANUARY 25

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*Poverty*



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"Sell what you have and give alms" (Lk. 12:33).

Our Savior requires that His disciples divest themselves completely of all property without thought of receiving material compensation or profit here below, but with the intention of enriching themselves before God by good works.

Divine Master, let me not fail, through ignorance or indifference, in practicing the poverty I have vowed.

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The renunciation of our will in the use of temporal goods is so essential to our vocation that the Church would not recognize as religious those who would make only the vows of obedience and chastity. The practice of poverty, therefore, is indispensable to our state. Poverty is, moreover, a supernatural virtue which is born of faith, nourished by hope, and brought to maturity in the love of Him who said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" and "*Sell what thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me.*" We could never complain of the sacrifices demanded by our vow of poverty if we reflected seriously upon what the Gospel tells us of the sacrifices Jesus imposed upon Himself for our

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sake. His life of sacrifice extended from the manger which served as His cradle to the cross which was His deathbed. How edifying would be our language and our conduct with regard to poverty, if we kept our eyes always fixed upon our divine Model!

Evangelical poverty means the renunciation of all attachment to material goods from the greatest to the least. The true religious clings to nothing. Are there any among us who are really poor in spirit and in heart, poor in their detachment from all created things, especially as regards their own ease and convenience? Upon such poverty depends the blessing of God upon Holy Cross. But perhaps many of us would be forced to admit that we give with one hand and take back with the other. Self-love is so quick to find excuses which could justify relaxation in this regard. It winds in and out of all we do like a serpent, hiding when we grow suspicious of it. It assumes all manner of forms and repays itself in small ways for the great sacrifices we have had the courage to make in spite of it. We sometimes cling tenaciously to something hardly worth naming, but something, nevertheless, which shows clearly how much alive nature still is. We will want for nothing; we feel the least privation and take care to arrange everything to our liking. How we deceive ourselves and how illogical we are!

This is not the poverty which the Rule presents to us; this is not the ideal of the early founders of religious orders. They made themselves as poor by sacrifice as the poor in the world are by necessity. They bore privation and austerity with submission and joy, enduring cold and heat, keeping silence, praying much and laboring hard. Ah, this is indeed to practice the poverty and the penitential life of Jesus Christ! This is that happy self-denial which begets the peace

and liberty of the children of God. Blessed are they who understand it and still more blessed are they who open their hearts to this evangelical poverty.

O my God, make us love poverty because it is indispensable to our religious life; make us love it because through the practice of evangelical poverty we merit a special share in the first of Your beatitudes. Keep continually before our minds the memory of Your cross and sufferings; help us to understand clearly that upon our observance of poverty according to Your spirit depends the prosperity of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the progress of each of us in Your love, and our perseverance in the spirit of our holy vocation.

JANUARY 26

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*Trust in Divine Providence*



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“Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on” (Mt. 6:25).

All Christians should live in the spirit of this precept of our Savior, but for those whose apostolic life is based on the practice of evangelical poverty, these words are to be taken in a full and literal sense.

O my God, teach me how to unite the attention that Your law requires me to give to temporal things with complete trust in Your Fatherly care of me.

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If we have given ourselves and all that is ours sincerely and totally to God, we may abandon ourselves with absolute confidence to His divine providence. This providence may

test us, but it will not desert us. It will not always give us at our desire the good things of this earth, but we shall certainly obtain from it all that is necessary. "*Look at the birds of the air,*" says our Savior, "*they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you of much more value than they? . . . See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these.*" The lilies of the field, which today are alive and tomorrow are thrown into the oven, not only grow effortlessly under the care of our Father, but to this growth that is necessary for them is added a beauty of purple, gold, and azure that excels all the splendors of Solomon in his glory. "*How much more you, O you of little faith!*" Could our Savior have portrayed for us in a more ravishing and moving manner the very Heart of God, His own Heart, filled with tender solicitude for all His creatures, but especially for His human children?

This counsel of our Savior does not, of course, exempt man from the divine decree: *In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread.* We are not dispensed from the law of work, mental and physical, which remains as a fundamental obligation for every Christian. The birds of the air have their own ingenious ways of finding their food and Heaven seconds their efforts. It will be the same for the Christian on two conditions which Jesus places before us in this instruction: we are not to live in anxiety and preoccupation over our temporal needs, and we are to set our hearts free from attachment to the goods of this life. "*Do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble,*" Jesus tells us. Then to this counsel He adds the positive precept: "*Seek first the*

*kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."*

By the *kingdom of God* we are to understand heaven and all that leads us there, that is, the salvation of our souls; also, in a higher, apostolic sense, the salvation of the souls of others and the spread of the Church. If we occupy ourselves with God's interests, He will concern Himself with ours. "*When I sent you forth without purse or wallet or sandals, did you lack anything?*" asked our Savior of His disciples, and they answered "*Nothing.*" It is always so for those who work for God, forgetting their personal interests. Furthermore, these laborers are easily satisfied; *having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content*, wrote St. Paul to St. Timothy. If we sincerely reflect upon our Savior's words in this instruction, how could we ever again entertain fearful and anxious thoughts about the present or the future?

O my God, grant me a strong filial confidence in Your paternal bounty and deign to keep this trust in Your providence unshaken throughout all the trials that You may will to send me. In all that I think and say and do, let me seek first the kingdom of heaven, trusting to Your Fatherly goodness for the rest. *Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings.*

## *Chastity*



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“And the unmarried woman, and the virgin, thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit” (1 Cor. 7:34).

Virginal integrity is only the first and basic requirement of the evangelical counsel of chastity; full supernatural observance of our vow of chastity applies also to affections, words, and actions.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to preserve lifelong virginal purity in thought, word, and deed.

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Of our three vows chastity is the most glorious, but it is also the most fragile; and to keep it perfectly until death is a difficult achievement. In order to reach and to persevere in the full accomplishment of this vow it is necessary for us to submit more and more completely to the law of supernatural love, which refers all to God and undertakes and suffers all for His glory. This means that we must not limit ourselves to the wearing of the religious habit, the garb of virginity. Our change of dress should lead to the reproducing of the sentiments and the manner of Jesus in our souls and our exterior conduct, according to St. Paul's injunction: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as for the flesh, take no thought for its lusts.*

Jacob, clothed by his mother in Esau's garments, with the skin of a kid placed on his neck and hands, obtained the blessings of his father. Applying this ruse to the moral order, we shall be able to win grace and favor from our heavenly

Father only by putting on the *new man*, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ. This we do, not as an artifice, however, but in obedience to the Father's will; and it is our Elder Brother Jesus Himself who clothes us with His virtues and merits. Our whole life should have for its end the assimilating of the thoughts, judgments, desires, and actions of Jesus Christ so perfectly that we can say with the great Apostle, *It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me*. This union makes us live the very life of Jesus; it restores all that we lost in Adam and makes us one moral person with the Savior. By it our actions gain for us supernatural merit and the right to eternal glory. How the soul thrills with joy at this thought! Could we ever allow our bodies, thus united with Christ and daily nourished by His most sacred Body, the slightest contact with impurity? Could we ever divide a heart that is one with His between Him and a creature?

But the vow of chastity, while it brings powerful graces to aid us in putting on Christ, it does not divest us of concupiscence. The grace that is given us to keep this vow is not meant to spare us the necessity of struggle and vigilance. To observe lifelong continence, lifelong watchfulness and prayer are needed; watchfulness that is expressed in a prudent distrust of self and the avoidance of occasions of temptation, prayer that is humble, frequent, and sincere. It is better to flee from temptations against chastity than to struggle with them, because our corrupt nature is so strongly inclined to yield in this kind of combat; the sure way to keep our treasure is to run away with it. No day should pass that we do not ask God with all our hearts for grace to observe perfectly our vow of chastity; and along with our prayer we should practice that temperance in all things which is prescribed by our vow of poverty. The vows, indeed, supplement one another, for obedi-

ence to rule and the poverty of the common life act as effective safeguards to chastity.

O Jesus, with Your grace I shall seek all my joy of love in You who has promised heaven and the sight of Yourself to the clean of heart. Your best beloved on earth were a virgin Mother, a virgin Foster Father, and a virgin Disciple. Through the power of the chaste and holy names of Mary and Joseph and by the intercession of St. John the Beloved, I hope to obtain from You, O most pure Lamb of God, a purity like theirs and a place among the virgin throng who follow You in heaven.

JANUARY 28

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### *Our Lady, Queen of Virgins*



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“Queen of Virgins, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

Mary is Queen of Virgins because she possessed the virtue of virginity in the most eminent degree and preserved it in the conception, the birth, and after the birth of our Savior.

O Virgin Mother Mary, show me how to imitate you in perfect virginal integrity and spiritual motherhood.

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In the fourth century St. Ephrem, called “the harp of the Holy Spirit,” praised the Virgin Mother of God in the most sublime and eloquent terms. In his panegyric of Mary he acclaimed her as “all-pure, all-immaculate, all-stainless, all-undefiled, all-blameless, all-worthy of praise, all-incorrupt.” For the infinitely pure God in whose sight *even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not clear*, all must be pure.



The materials used for the service of God in Solomon's temple were prescribed to be of the finest and purest: the finest gold, the purest oil, pure incense, pure myrrh. These are all only types of Mary, the Virgin of virgins, to whom the Church applies the words of the Book of Wisdom: *Nought that is sullied enters into her. For she is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God.* The fruitfulness of Mary's example, furthermore, has espoused to Christ as virgin brides multitudes of women in every age of the Church.

But what is Mary's present role with regard to these souls whom the Church calls "spouses of Christ"? Not only is she "Keeper of our virginity," as she is invoked by St. Gertrude, but she is also, and pre-eminently, our inspiration and model. We are called to reproduce Mary's virtue and to continue in some measure her work for Jesus and for souls. The virtue of virginity implies not only integrity of body and cleanness of heart, but also fruitfulness. To live the full virginal life we must, like Mary, give life; for our God is the God of the living and therefore everything relating to Him must bear the impress of life. We are to aspire to a spiritual maternity, a higher fertility, which is an image of Mary's, and which like hers is extended to all who are in need of spiritual care. It is in this sense that the words of the Sovereign Judge will bring us either joy or remorse on the last day, when He will say to those on His right hand, "*I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.*"

In order to fulfill this mission we must possess in the order of grace what corresponds to the power of fecundity

in the order of nature. To transmit the life of God as Mary did and continues to do, we must have it ourselves and desire to possess it in ever greater fullness. The first requirement in preparing ourselves and others for increased gifts of grace is the deepening of our capacity for self-giving. Mary never sought to draw others to herself; and if we are self-seeking we shall be, like Eve, only a source of ruin for ourselves and others. But if we give to our utmost, we shall receive a hundredfold in the increased power for good, in giving birth to Jesus in our own souls, and in preparing the way for the entrance of His grace into the souls of others. Mary appeared to renounce the power of transmitting life, yet she became the source of life for every child of Adam; she appeared to renounce a family, yet all generations invoke her as their Mother.

O Queen of all the virgin choir,  
Enthroned above the starry sky!  
Who with thy bosom's milk didst feed  
Thy own Creator, Lord most high.

What man had lost in hapless Eve,  
Thy sacred womb to man restores,  
Thou to the wretched here below  
Hast opened heaven's eternal doors.

Hail, O refulgent Hall of light!  
Hail, Gate august of heaven's high King!  
Through thee redeemed to endless life,  
Thy praise let all the nations sing

O Jesu, born of Virgin bright,  
Immortal glory be to Thee;  
Praise to the Father infinite  
And Holy Ghost eternally.

*Obedience*



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“It is the Lord!” (Jn. 21:7)

As the Beloved Disciple knew and answered the voice of his risen Master before He was recognized by the others, so we should respond to the divine will in the voice of our Superiors. Lord Jesus, teach me to understand and practice perfect religious obedience.

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The good religious says to herself: “Whatever may be the natural competence of the one who has authority over me, even though she seem to me not to have the light and experience necessary for the office she holds, yet it is the Lord who speaks to me through her. Whether she is young or old, commendable or not for her spirit or her talents, *it is the Lord*. Even if she is imprudent, unfair, insincere, indiscreet, capricious, *it is the Lord* and I shall obey.” Such a religious, inspired by supernatural faith and love, rejects and disowns all the unworthy motives which might rob her of the merit of obedience: all human respect, all natural considerations, all self-interest. Following the counsel of the prince of the Apostles, she purifies her soul more and more by her *obedience to charity*. O may divine charity be the sole motive and principle of our submission! Then, obeying only to please the Lord, we shall also lighten our Superior’s burden and edify our brethren.

Besides purity of intention, religious obedience should possess the quality of promptness. To postpone our obedience is

clearly to refuse it for as long as the delay lasts; it is to do the work of God negligently and to resist grace. How could we act so toward the great Master we serve! We should obey like the arrow which, once released from the bow, flies swift and straight to the mark. The sound of the bell, the Superior's voice, are a divine summons. "*The Master . . . calls thee,*" said Martha to her sister Mary, and *as soon as she heard this she rose quickly and came to him.*

Religious obedience is also unreserved; it extends to all matters, all places, and all times. It is given in secret as in public, in little things as in great, in silence as in recreation, in rest as in labor, in prayer as in mortification, in health as in sickness. If we obey like this we truly live according to the Rule and we practice the abnegation that is indispensable to a disciple of Jesus Christ; for obedience that is without reserve means constant denial of self-will. If a Superior is unjust or capricious in exercising her authority, her will, nevertheless, becomes in a mysterious and important sense the will of God for us. We are in greater need of dying to our own will and judgment than we are of being enlightened, edified, and consoled by faultless Superiors. Finally, the obedience of a good religious is constant with that perseverance which is its perfection and its crown. God grant that our last days as religious may resemble or even surpass our first ones in this regard! Like Jesus, *the author and finisher* of our obedience as He is of our faith, let us be consistent and faithful *even unto death.*

Deign to complete and perfect. O God, the work You have begun in me. Grant that I may esteem and practice disinterested, prompt, unreserved, and persevering fidelity to what is prescribed for me by my Rule and my Superiors. Make of me a living oblation, a living Host. *The way of truth I have*

*chosen; I have set your ordinances before me. I cling to your decrees; O Lord, let me not be put to shame. I will run the way of your commands when you give me a docile heart.*

JANUARY 30

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### *Unprofitable Servants*



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“When you have done everything that was commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do’” (Lk. 17:10).

These words, which are part of a short parable or comparison, our Savior addressed to His Apostles whom He had taken aside to instruct privately.

O Jesus, grant me clarity of understanding that I may appraise myself justly before You.

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The lesson our Lord here teaches His Apostles and us concerns not the merit we gain in serving Him, but the humility which should constantly be ours in offering Him our service. In this instruction Jesus warns us against self-glorification on account of the good we have been able to do. Our keeping of His law does not confer a favor upon God, nor does it place Him in our debt; our homage and faithful service are simply His due. By His gracious mercy He has decreed to reward the service we owe Him, but apart from this gratuitous promise on His part, we have no claim to a reward. Our Savior conveys this truth in the form of a short parable. A man has a servant whose duty it is to work in the fields and prepare his master’s meals.

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In the evening when the servant returns from the fields, his master does not bid him rest and have his supper, but he orders the servant to prepare and serve him his meal; only after the master has finished will the servant be free to satisfy his own hunger. *"Does he thank that servant,"* continued our Lord, *"for doing what he commanded him? I do not think so."*

Surely Jesus does not wish to draw the conclusion that God, our Sovereign Master, is not pleased with our diligence in obeying His commands, but He desires to warn us against the danger of thinking, in our pride, that we merit recompense and marks of gratitude from God for our good works; for we are able to accomplish these works only because of the faith that is in us by His gift. This parable, which was particularly addressed to the Apostles, applied to them with particular aptness. They were the servants, the vinedressers, the shepherds, the ministers of Christ. The duties of their mission were manifold and required their whole energy, all their faculties, all their time; but these duties did not of themselves confer the right of a recompense or to particular favor. All that the Master might will to grant in this respect would be granted only through His goodness and graciousness; this is the implication of our Savior's concluding words: *"Even so you also, when you have done everything that was commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.'"*

Thus does Jesus indicate in general the relations of the creature with the Creator; for when the Apostles had succeeded in converting souls by their preaching and so furthered, as they believed, the divine glory, the temptation might arise to ascribe some of that glory to themselves. Yielding to such a temptation would mean that they had

misunderstood what their part in the work of salvation really was. In reality, all that was good in them — all that is good in any of us and all the good we do — comes from God and should be turned back to Him. As for ourselves, we only express the simple truth when we call ourselves *unprofitable servants*.

“I adore You, O God, I count myself as nothing before Your divine Majesty. You alone are Being, Life, Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. I glorify You, I praise You, I give You thanks, and I love You, all helpless and unworthy as I am, in union with Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Brother, in the merciful kindness of His Heart and through His infinite merits. I desire to serve You, to obey You, and to love You always, in union with Mary Immaculate, Mother of God and our Mother, loving also and serving my neighbor for love of You . . .” (*Raccolta*).

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JANUARY 31

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### *The Apostolic Life*



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“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (Jn. 15:16).

See Jesus instructing the Apostles and forming them for their future ministry.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to acquire the apostolic spirit and to practice the apostolic virtues.

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The virtues which, collectively, make you as a Sister of the Holy Cross a truly apostolic person are, with reference

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to yourself, chastity, obedience, and poverty; with regard to your neighbor, zeal, amiability, and patience; and with relation to God, love of prayer, conformity to the divine will, and humble trust in divine providence. The apostolic virtues which affect your personal conduct are the ones you vowed to practice on the day of your religious profession. Your Model in their exercise is Jesus Himself, who has left us in the Gospel examples in plenty of His observance of the virtues represented by your three vows. There is also the example of the Apostles and of the apostolic men who succeeded them, the prescriptions of your Rule, the help you receive in spiritual conferences and from spiritual reading. Examine yourself carefully on your observance of the virtues of your vows and daily ask our Lord to strengthen you in the practice of them.

With reference to God you live the apostolic life insofar as you are a woman of prayer. We read in the Gospel that Jesus passed entire nights in prayer, as though to prepare Himself for the work of the morrow. Can we doubt that the Apostles followed His example? The Acts tell us that they relieved themselves of certain occupations that they might give themselves *to prayer and to the ministry of the word*. You, on your part, should at least never shorten the time for prayer prescribed by the Rule. Such fidelity will gain for you the divine assistance in your work and greater regularity in your general conduct. For you also prayer should be the great preparation for your work.

Jesus is also your Model in practicing conformity to the divine will. Learn to be resigned to the will of God in what may be for you a lesser share of natural or supernatural gifts, in a diversity of employments and places, or in uncongenial ones, in failure and humiliation. Our Savior



possessed all imaginable talents, but He manifested them only to the extent and in the manner willed by the Father. He engaged in manual labor or in preaching as the Father directed, always in Palestine because such was the Father's will. And yet, how many heeded His words or even understood them rightly despite all His zealous teaching in public and private, despite all His miracles? Bearing always in your mind the example of our Savior, carry out the duties assigned to you under obedience in dispositions of perfect confidence in God and deep humility. Be as trustful of God, who speaks to you through your Superiors, as you are distrustful of yourself, remembering that if we cannot succeed even in natural enterprises without divine help, grace will surely be needed in the supernatural task of forming the young to virtue. My dear daughters in Jesus Christ, be persuaded that you cannot worthily acquit yourself of your obedience unless you are faithful to your religious exercises, devoted to study, habitually united with our Lord, and constant in your practice of humility.

“Lord Jesus, by the merits and prayers of the Virgin Mary . . . pour out upon me and my brethren and upon the religious of the entire world, the spirit of faith, sacrifice, prayer, humility, docility, and charity. Grant, O my Jesus, that this spirit of charity may be truly supernatural, universal, understanding, long-suffering, joyous, and fruitful” (*Raccolta*).

*"I Am Not the Christ"*



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"And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, 'Who art thou?'" (Jn. 1:19)

The ecclesiastical authorities of the Jews could not remain indifferent in the face of the growing spiritual movement created by the preaching of St. John the Baptist; especially in view of the popular belief that John himself was the Messiah whose advent he was proclaiming.

St. John the Baptist, help me to learn from you how to practice humility.

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The envoys of the Jews first questioned John about his identity. Was he himself the Messiah, or at least Elias, whose coming *before the great and dreadful day of the Lord* Malachias had prophesied; or was he the Prophet equal to Moses, foretold in the Book of Deuteronomy? St. John answered formally in the negative. To avoid offending so important a personage as the son of the priest Zachary and one who in his own right enjoyed the highest esteem among the people, the delegates sent from Jerusalem had not put their question directly; but John replied to their thought rather than to their spoken words and declared, "*I am not the Christ.*"

The very phrasing of the Evangelist St. John's account of this part of the interview conveys to us something of the surprise and dismay with which the question as to his identity must have been received by the holy Precursor. The

repetition in the words of the Gospel text reflects even more clearly, perhaps, his grieved embarrassment at perceiving that he had been so grossly misunderstood as to be confused with his Master. *And he acknowledged and did not deny*, writes the Evangelist; *and he acknowledged, "I am not the Christ."* The truly humble soul, when credited with merits or qualities she does not possess, experiences a kind of indignation. False humility, on the contrary, declines praise in such a manner as to convey the impression that it is really deserved.

St. John answered in the negative also the inquiries of the delegates as to whether he was Elias or the Prophet. *And they asked him, "What then? Art thou Elias?" And he said, "I am not." "Art thou the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."* True humility is ingenious in discovering a sense in which the praise and honor it receives are not merited. Our Savior Himself had said of St. John the Baptist that he was a prophet and *more than a prophet* and that he was *Elias who was to come*. John was Elias according to the spirit, the Elias who should precede the first coming of the Messiah. He was more than a prophet in that he was announcing the arrival and greatness of Him upon whom all the prophecies converged. He was not, however, *the Prophet* whom his questioners had in mind. We may also observe that St. John replies very briefly to all these queries, for they delayed him in his mission to speak of Jesus. The humble soul cuts short all that concerns merely itself and seeks to change the subject of conversation that it may touch upon Him who alone is worthy of praise. It is by the habitual preference of God's honor to our own gratification that we strengthen courage and enkindle love even to the point of martyrdom.

O Jesus, help me to give testimony to You by my works and to

make You known and loved by every means in my power, but let me regard myself as an *unprofitable servant*. Establish me in sincere humility, so that I may soon arrive at an intimate union with You; and thus begin on earth what I may hope to continue in heaven.

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FEBRUARY 2

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*The Purification of Our Lady*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 793)

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FEBRUARY 3

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*The Voice in the Desert*



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“They therefore said to him, ‘Who art thou? that we may give an answer to those who sent us’” (Jn. 1:22).

The priests and Levites, determined to extract a definite answer, continue to interrogate John.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of self-knowledge.

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When it became necessary for St. John to speak directly of himself, he said, “*I am the voice of one crying in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said Isaias the prophet*”; that is, “I am only an echo of the voice of God.” St. John could scarcely have said less, but he might truthfully have said much more; for he was the special ambassador of God. Yet he had said enough to make his questioners understand that the ancient prophecies authorized

his mission, that he was entering upon its accomplishment, and that the proclaiming of the advent of the Lord constituted this fulfillment. Strength of soul is shown by action and in the wasting of few words. True humility says, "Do not ask me who I am, but look at what the grace of God enables me to do."

*And they who had been sent were from among the Pharisees; that is, they were men of power and prestige, but disdainful, haughty, and critical. Nothing met with their approval except that which they themselves had done or authorized. In this characteristic spirit of domineering pride they made still another imperious demand: And they asked him, and said to him, "Why, then, dost thou baptize, if thou art not the Christ, nor Elias, nor the Prophet?"* As the Precursor of the Messiah, John had a better right to baptize than Elias or any of the prophets. But the humble do not answer reproach by justifying themselves, nor by asserting their rights. John spoke of his baptism modestly and in few words, but he extolled at length the greatness of Jesus: *"I baptize with water; but in the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know. He it is who is to come after me, who has been set above me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to loose."* John's baptism was not that of the Messiah; it was a simple preparation, a baptism of water for disposing to repentance and not for conferring grace.

This answer from such a man would have impressed the envoys and those who had sent them, had both parties been motivated by good will and a right intention. But as it was, they saw in his words merely the assurance that John was not claiming to be the Messiah, and so they would have nothing more to fear from him. Divine grace had granted them in this interview with St. John an official announce-

ment, a divine testimony of the coming of the Messiah. Yet, instead of questioning John further on this point, they scornfully turned aside to a captious question about his right to baptize. Thus begins the blindness of the Jews whom we see in this mystery resisting the very first rays of the true Light.

O Jesus, grant me strength like that of Your holy Precursor united with his humility. Make my whole peace and happiness lie in my dependence upon You. Let me cling to You, my Redeemer, with so tender a love and so humble an attachment that my will can never deviate even a hair's breadth from Your divine will.

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FEBRUARY 4

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### *Self-Knowledge*



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“What hast thou to say of thyself?” (Jn. 1:22)

Picture the scene at Bethany beyond the Jordan, where St. John was bearing witness to the Savior before the delegation sent from Jerusalem.

*Lord, that I may see* — who You are and who I am.

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Who are we and what have we to say of ourselves? What we are in the eyes of the sovereign majesty of God is that which we really are and nothing more. The soul's grasp of its true relation to its Creator is the very foundation of Christian humility; but this realization is difficult to acquire and more difficult to maintain, because it is directly opposed to self-love. Self-knowledge will destroy self-love by making the soul conscious of its sinfulness and imperfection. It is

this knowledge really possessed that makes saints, for it produces true wisdom and holiness in the soul. The more one knows himself the humbler he becomes and the more he knows and loves God.

God reveals Himself to little ones, showing them ever greater heights of His infinite greatness and ever greater depths of their own nothingness. St. Augustine profoundly understood this when he prayed, "Let me know Thee, O my God, that I may love Thee; let me know myself that I may despise myself." St. Francis of Assisi's habitual prayer was, "Who art Thou, my God, and who am I?" Any soul, that by prayer and the exercise of faith comes to see God and its relation to Him, must live in what it sees and so become perfect and strong and capable of leading others to this same knowledge and way of life. In the light of our own nothingness we better understand the wisdom and power of God and His great mercy in loving us and wishing to be loved by us.

Who am I? Mere dust, a sinner incapable of myself of doing any good, or of acting at all, since without the assistance of God I could not speak or think or move. St. John the Baptist referred to himself as a *voice*. A voice has no power of itself, but only through the one who makes it sound forth. What was I before my entrance into this world? A nonentity, drawn out of the void by the divine love of predilection. What am I to be after I leave this world? A citizen of heaven, saved by the infinite mercy of God, or an inhabitant of hell, lost by my own choice. Out of His infinite and merciful love God has raised me to the unspeakable dignity of bearing the names: Catholic, Christian, child of God, coheir with Jesus Christ to the kingdom of heaven. His gratuitous grace in Baptism has made me a

member of the Mystical Body of Christ, a living temple of the Holy Spirit. I, who am nothingness and less, because of my sins, can aspire to the perfect knowledge and love of God in the Beatific Vision.

Father in heaven, without You I am nothing, I can do nothing, I have nothing but sin; yet, full of confidence in Your divine goodness, I implore You to raise me to an ever greater knowledge and love of You. I am Your creature, redeemed by the blood of Your Son, sanctified by Your Holy Spirit, a child of Your Church. Deign to continue and increase Your benefits to me, that I may celebrate Your mercies in joy and thanksgiving forever in heaven.

FEBRUARY 5

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### *The Departure of Jesus From Nazareth*



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“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee” (Mk. 1:9).

The words, *in those days*, probably refer to the days of our Lord’s hidden life at Nazareth, which ended when He had attained His thirtieth year. At this time He left His home in Nazareth and went to be baptized by St. John the Baptist. Divine Savior, perfect in me the virtues of self-sacrifice and abnegation.

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The time foreshadowed by the three days’ loss had arrived. Jesus was now to leave His home in Nazareth, His ordinary occupations, His days of recollection and peace. He would leave His holy Mother, who loved Him so tenderly, and in whose soul His grace had wrought such marvels



of sanctity. She would now be left alone and in deep sorrow at their separation. Grief over the parting filled the sacred heart of Jesus also, but it did not deter Him. One day He was to say to His Apostles that whoever does not prefer God to his father and mother, and even to his own life, is not worthy of Him, and, also, that it is necessary to obey the first summons and not look back. This renunciation He practiced first Himself, to impress upon us more strongly its necessity for the apostolic vocation, and also to make our sacrifice and our perseverance in it easier and more meritorious. Doubtless, Jesus prepared His Mother for the separation, and surely Mary made the sacrifice voluntarily and generously. How loving, yet unselfish, their farewell must have been! It was a sad moment for both Jesus and Mary, and yet their sorrow was tempered by their great love for God and for us.

Let us contemplate the Savior as He goes to begin the establishment of His kingdom. Never did earthly sovereign go forth to such a conquest, nor, indeed, to any conquest in such a manner — without companions, poor, unknown. In the prophecies of Isaias we find sentiments that may well have been those of the Heart of Jesus as He left the holy companionship of Mary to mingle with sinners: *The Lord God hath opened my ear, and I do not resist; I have not gone back. . . . The Lord God is my helper, therefore am I not confounded; therefore have I set my face as a most hard rock, and I know that I shall not be confounded. He is near that justifieth me, who will contend with me? . . . Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that heareth the voice of his servant, that hath walked in darkness and hath no light? Let him hope in the name of the Lord, and lean upon his God.* Then, associating Himself with sinners as if He were one of them, Jesus came to ask of John His baptism. At

sight of the Savior who had regenerated him in the womb of his mother, baptizing him in the Holy Spirit, John must have fallen on his knees in adoration, but Jesus bade the protesting John to *let it be so now*. It was He who bowed before John. He, Infinite Justice, who, having taken upon Himself the iniquity of us all, asked for John's baptism. Sacrifice! Abnegation! Shall we fail to see our need of practicing these virtues, when Jesus Christ judged it necessary to practice them?

O my Savior, how Your example confounds my pretensions! The first acts of Your apostolate were acts of self-sacrifice and humility; yet I dread self-denial. I am ashamed to appear insignificant or to have others see my faults. I try to hide my weaknesses and cover my failings with excuses. How little it becomes to me to seek to pass for a saint, when You the Saint of saints, willed to appear as a sinner! Strengthen me, good Jesus, in the practice of self-abnegation, and help me to look upon my faults as so many reasons for casting myself with full confidence upon Your mercy.

FEBRUARY 6

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*Virgin Most Faithful*



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“Virgin most faithful, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

The evil which came upon the human race in the beginning was the result of the unfaithfulness of our first mother Eve. The faithful Mary by her shining loyalty reversed for us the sentence of doom pronounced upon Eve.

Mary, most faithful Virgin, increase in me the virtue of fidelity to my religious obligations.

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To be faithful means to keep one's word, to be true in affection and allegiance. Mary gave her promise of loyalty to God when she said, "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.*" But Mary's *Fiat* was above all a word of acceptance, of consent. She knew that she was being asked to become the mother of One who would be crucified, yet her answer to the divine message was, "*Let it be done.*" Later, Mary would sing her exultant *Magnificat*, but her first word to God was *Fiat*, "I consent." "The nicest word to say to the good God," once said a holy child, "is 'Yes.'" And how fruitful was Mary's consent to God's demand! "The great God accomplished more through the Blessed Virgin's *Fiat* than His own," said St. Anselm. "Why? Because God's *Fiat* was a *Fiat* of command, whereas the Blessed Virgin's *Fiat* was a *Fiat* of obedience." "We were all created by God's eternal word," adds St. Bernard, "and, behold, we die; in thy brief answer, *Fiat*, we find a new being and are called back to life."

Mary was called upon to confirm the *Fiat* of the Annunciation constantly throughout the rest of her life. Daily, new mysteries were being presented to her which demanded from her ever deeper depths of self-surrender and trust. Moreover, our Lady not only accepted without curiosity or question the divine messages that were conveyed to her directly, but she acquiesced also in those given to St. Joseph. Superior though she was to him in sanctity and knowledge and in her mission, she submitted to his decisions without question. When it came to Jesus, however, Mary's loyalty was really boundless. She faced exile and the danger of death for Him

with the same love and fidelity with which she had given Him birth, fed Him, and clothed Him. But never did she more deservedly bear her title of "Most Faithful Virgin" than during the Passion. Calvary saw the crowning peak of her lifelong fidelity to Jesus. When to the others all seemed lost in shameful defeat, she, the valiant Woman, the Faithful One, stood beside the Cross.

How many faithful virgins have since found their strength in the Virgin Mother who kept her station at the cross, faithful unto death; for many saints affirm that our Lady would have died of sorrow at the foot of the cross unless her life had been preserved by a special divine intervention. How faithful she has been also to the mission she received from Jesus on the cross when He gave her to us as our Mother! Not only did she exercise her maternal care in the spiritual interests of the infant Church, but she desires to gather the whole posterity of Adam under her protecting mantle. "As our Adversary goes about seeking whom he may devour," says St. Bernard de Bustis, "Mary looks for those whom she may assist toward salvation." Eternity alone can reveal how much the Virgin Mother has done for us, for each of us individually.

O Mary, Virgin most faithful, Queen of virgins, help me to be unreserved and persevering in confirming the gift of myself that I made at my religious profession. May your title "Virgin most faithful" be an efficacious source of inspiration and strength for me. And as your Son committed me to your care when He was dying on the cross, deign to continue, O good Mother, your gracious protection "now and at the hour of my death."

## *The Baptism of Jesus*



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“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John, at the Jordan, to be baptized by him” (Mt. 3:13).

According to tradition, the place of our Savior’s baptism was at the ford of the Jordan river not far from Jericho. Here, the people, under the Baptist’s direction were being initiated into the spiritual life and were preparing themselves for the coming of the Messias.

O Jesus, grant me the grace truly to renounce the devil and his works and pomps and attach myself to You forever.

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Jesus willed to receive baptism from John, first, in order to confirm by this act the mission of the Precursor and, in particular, the baptism he conferred, which was a figure of Christian Baptism. Second, Jesus wished to manifest Himself on this occasion in the presence of the people, and receive publicly divine confirmation of His mission. Third, He desired to teach us by His example to profit by all the means of salvation established by God, even when we are not formally commanded to do so. This intention is evident in His answer to John’s remonstrance, “*Let it be so now, for so it becomes us to fulfill all justice.*” The baptism of penance was not explicitly commanded, but all were counseled to avail themselves of it. The God-Man was, to human eyes, a man like other men; thus far He had obeyed all the prescriptions of the Law, and so now He willed also to receive John’s baptism, the condition preparatory to the Messianic age. This baptism of John was not efficacious in itself,

but it evoked or gave expression to sorrow for sin, and Jesus had taken upon Himself the sins of the world.

What secret rapture must have filled the soul of the stern and austere Precursor as he gazed for the first time upon the Messiah, whose coming he had announced with such fidelity, zeal, and selflessness! Shock and confusion must also have arisen within John upon seeing this strange inversion of roles—the Savior coming to him, listening to his preaching, and presenting Himself to be baptized by him. But John responded to our Savior's request with filial simplicity. Filled with reverential fear, he placed his hand upon the sacred head and bowed it beneath the water. Jesus then poured out upon the soul of John an abundance of heavenly blessings; while, to His creature, water, as it came into contact with His sacred body, He communicated the power of bringing forth "a new and heavenly progeny" as the Church says in her blessing of the baptismal font.

Then, as Jesus came up from the waters of the Jordan, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon Him under the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father was heard saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" This manifestation of our Savior was more solemn and splendid than any that had preceded it, in that the Holy Trinity Itself here bore witness to His divinity; and this at the moment when Jesus most humbled and annihilated Himself. This occasion, furthermore, marked the formal investiture of Jesus with the mission of His public life.

Father in heaven, grant me so to live that one day I shall hear Your voice saying to me, "You are My beloved child. I regard you with complacency, for I see in you the purity, humility, and obedience of My only-begotten Son in whom I am always well pleased." Jesus, my Lord and Redeemer, I thank You for the

grace of Baptism, which opened to me the gates of the Church, both in heaven and on earth. Cause Your cleansing baptismal waters to flow out and inundate the whole world, as *a river of peace*, that all men may be regenerated, and that Your sanctifying grace may renew the face of the earth.

FEBRUARY 8

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### *Jesus Led to the Desert*



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“Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led about the desert by the Spirit for forty days, being tempted all the while by the devil” (Lk. 4:1, 2).

After His baptism, Jesus, filled with the consolation and joy of the Holy Spirit, retired to the region of Quarantania, northwest of ancient Jericho.

Divine Savior, grant me Your spirit in performing the works of my apostolate.

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Our Savior’s life in the desert was to be a preparation for His public life. His work demanded this preparation, for it had to do with saving souls, and souls are purchased only by prayer and penance. It was by His prayer, fasting, and contacts with Satan in the desert that Jesus purchased the souls He was later to convert. Even from the natural view it is clear that one should be well established oneself in the spiritual life before undertaking to direct others. Therefore, having invested the God-Man with His public apostolate, the Holy Spirit took upon Himself His direction, as it were, and conducted Him first into solitude. Our Savior’s prompt

and docile compliance with the inspiration of the Spirit of God gives us a beautiful example of how we should obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit, whether He inspires us to engage in exterior works or to renew our strength in recollection and prayer.

The life of Jesus in the desert, was, above all, a life of prayer, prolonged, perfect, ardent. It was also a life of austerity because of the rugged and desolate nature of the locality and also the time of the year; for our Savior's long retreat probably occurred in winter, the season of rain and wind. It was rigorous, too, by reason of the long fast during forty days and forty nights; and, in addition to this, Jesus had to undergo temptation and struggle with the devil. Why did He choose to endure these rigors? First, He desired to experience in His own Person all that belongs to humanity, sin excepted. The life of the good Christian was to be spent in prayer, penance, and struggle against temptation; and so Christ willed to take upon Himself all these hardships. How great a consolation this is for us! *For we have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tried as we are in all things except sin.*

Second, Jesus wished to give us the example of how to pray, expiate, and resist temptation. He Himself atoned by this sojourn in the desert for all the faults of men in these respects; for, through the abandonment of prayer and penance, and especially because of their feeble resistance to temptation, all humanity had fallen, little by little, into the power of Satan. Last, He desired to merit for us the grace necessary for the hard labors of prayer, penance, and struggle against evil. Temptation loses much of its fearsomeness when we remember that, although we may feel ourselves isolated and alone in our conflicts with the powers of hell, our good Master



is never far from us; that He is in our hearts, ready to give us the grace which He Himself merited for us.

O Jesus, You teach me a salutary lesson in this mystery. So often I am tempted to neglect prayer and meditation in favor of external works. But here I see You, filled with the Holy Spirit after Your baptism, still not considering Yourself ready for Your apostolate. Help me to remember always that You alone are my strength, and that I must draw it from You. The more active I am in external works, the greater is my need of being still more preoccupied with securing for myself Your aid and co-operation.

FEBRUARY 9

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### *The Temptation of Jesus*



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“Then Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit, to be tempted by the devil” (Mt. 4:1).

Contemplate Jesus being tempted by the devil after His fast of forty days and forty nights. Our Savior would have deprived us of a very useful lesson if He had not taught us how we should resist the Tempter.

Divine Master, help me to learn from You how to resist temptation.

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Satan had observed the scene at the baptism of Jesus, and he had heard the words from heaven. He could not have comprehended their full meaning, however, for to recognize Jesus as Son of God in the proper sense of the term required faith or revelation. His conclusion on this point was probably at best conjectural. But Satan did know that Jesus intended to evangelize Israel and it was important to turn

Him aside from this mission. He would, therefore, attempt to goad Him to a self-assertive display of power and to incite in Him a desire for earthly glory, such as the Jews dreamed of for the Messiah whom they were awaiting.

Approaching our Savior, whether visibly or invisibly it is impossible to determine, the devil cleverly took advantage of His state of exhaustion after His prolonged fast. "*If thou art the Son of God,*" he said to Him, "*command that these stones become loaves of bread.*" Jesus was the Son of God and He could have done what the devil suggested, but He would not use His miraculous power unnecessarily or to satisfy a personal need. He did not even answer the devil directly, but, showing His perfect detachment from everything except the will of God, He countered the word of the Tempter with the word of God: "*Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*" Then, in spirit or in reality, the devil transported Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, overlooking the valley of Cedron, and tried a second time: "*If thou art the Son of God, throw thyself down* [since this too is written in the Scripture]: '*He will give his angels charge concerning thee. . .*'" "*It is written further,*" replied Jesus, "*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" Finally, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, saying, "*All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" "*Begone, Satan!*" responded Jesus, "*for it is written, 'The Lord thy God shalt thou worship and him only shalt thou serve.'*" Then, with his aim unachieved, the devil left Him.

Always Satan attacks us at our most vulnerable point. He works upon the distress we feel or the desire which besets us. Jesus was hungry, and He desired to win His people.

Satan offered Him the means of satisfying His hunger and dazzling His people by the sudden, brilliant acquisition of sovereign earthly power. When we are tempted, our will is drawn in two directions; there is a struggle between the sinful attraction and the voice of conscience. In our Savior's case there could be nothing like this. Any evil suggestion could arouse in Him only horror and aversion. Yet, even with Jesus struggle was possible and, therefore, victory and merit. The laborious path of the Father's will, that His whole life should be one of effort, privation, and combat, was painful to nature. To procure the salvation of the world by a brilliant stroke, to lead a tranquil and glorious life, was desirable to the humanity of our Savior. But He renewed His submission to the Father's will and His acceptance of the plan of our redemption. The reward was immediate. After the devil left Him, *Behold, angels came and ministered to him.*

O divine Savior, make me alert to the wiles of Satan. Help me to imitate You in saying to him in every temptation, "God does not wish it, and I do not discuss any order or prohibition of His."

FEBRUARY 10

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### *The Testimony of St. John Baptist*



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"And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:34).

The occasion of this new testimony of John was the appearance of our Savior on the banks of the Jordan, perhaps in returning from the forty days' fast that followed His baptism.

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Holy Precursor of our Savior, pray for me, that my practice of penance may lead to spiritual insight.

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Jesus came to the place where John was baptizing, not only to receive this new testimony of His Precursor in the presence of the people, but also to choose His first followers from among John's disciples. The appearance of our Savior as He came to meet John, must have been full of majesty and amiability, since the testimony of John on this occasion sufficed to decide the vocations of Jesus' first disciples. When he saw our Savior approaching, John pointed Him out to the crowd, saying, "*Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" Thus he identified Jesus as the Redeemer of the world through sacrifice and immolation.

Undoubtedly, the holy Precursor of our Savior, under special inspiration, was applying to Jesus the words of Isaias in his prophecy of the Passion: *He was offered because it was his own will, and he opened not his mouth; he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.* The qualities and characteristics of the Savior — purity, innocence, patience, sweetness, and especially His divine origin — were all summed up by John in his phrase, *lamb of God*. John bore witness also to the eternal pre-existence of Jesus by adding: "*This is he, of whom I said, 'After me there comes one who has been set above me, because he was before me.'*" Then he repeated and confirmed his testimony to Jesus by recalling that he had come to know Him, not in a natural manner; that is, not through previous contacts with Him, but by a supernatural means. An interior grace had made the Savior known to John when He presented Himself to be baptized; besides, an exterior sign had been indicated to John in advance and this

was now realized by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Savior.

This testimony of St. John the Baptist represents the first formal and public recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. And it was given in so beautiful and explicit a manner that the Church still uses it at the moment of Holy Communion to attest her own faith in our Savior. Furthermore, the designation of the redemptive mission of Jesus by the phrase, *lamb of God*, is especially favored by St. John the Evangelist. He uses it so habitually in the Apocalypse that one would say it was engraved upon his heart. St. John had learned well the lesson taught him by his first master, the Precursor.

“O God, whose only begotten Son appeared in the substance of our flesh, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may be inwardly reformed by Him, whom we recognize to have been outwardly like ourselves” (Roman Missal).

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FEBRUARY 11

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*Our Lady of Lourdes*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 795)

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FEBRUARY 12

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*The Season of Septuagesima*



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“Praise be to thee, O Lord, King of eternal glory!” (Roman Breviary.)

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From Septuagesima until Easter the Church suspends her joyous and heavenly *Alleluia* and replaces it with this cry of earth.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of entering into the penitential spirit of Your Church in preparing for the Lenten season.

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“There are two times,” says St. Augustine; “the one runs on amid the temptations and anxieties of this life, the other will be spent in rest and everlasting joy. These two times we celebrate also here on earth, the one before, the other after Easter. The time before Easter signifies the sorrows of this present life, the time after Easter, the heavenly blessedness we shall enjoy. Therefore, we spend the first of these times in fasting and prayer; while during the second we suspend our fast and give ourselves to praise.”

The grave maternal voice of the Church will soon be heard inviting us to Lenten penance. She wishes us to prepare for it by considering the fall of our first parents and the deep wounds inflicted upon our souls by sin. In order to reflect worthily upon the glories of the Resurrection, we must first be purified by courageously looking into the abyss of our own personal misery, of which the *Introit* of the Mass for Septuagesima Sunday reminded us: *The cords of the nether world enmeshed me, the snares of death overtook me. In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God; from his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. I love you, O Lord, my strength; O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.*

God will grant us His divine light for the discovery and the humble acknowledgment of our true state. When we shall have gazed long and lovingly upon our crucified Savior, we shall learn the gravity of sin and the cost of its forgiveness. We shall come to know ourselves, to understand the grievous-

ness of original sin, the malice of our personal sins, and, at least in some degree, the infinite mercy of God toward us. Then shall we be well prepared for the holy expiation of Lent and for the ineffable joys of Easter as well. During this time, therefore, we should continue that which we do at all seasons, but we should do it more fervently and earnestly. We should sigh and weep after our true country from which we have been exiled because of sin and redouble our efforts to regain it by penitence and compunction of heart. The Christian who would prepare for Lent according to the spirit of the Church must wage war against that false security and self-complacency so common to weak and tepid souls and so conducive to spiritual barrenness.

Divine Redeemer, let me not be like a heedless wayfarer who forgets his true country and prefers the place of his banishment to his home; nor like the sick man who cannot be persuaded that his life is in danger. Help me to run to You, O divine Physician, and to show You my wounds, crying out with all my heart, *Have pity on me, O Lord . . . heal me, O Lord.*

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FEBRUARY 13

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### *The Fall of the Angels*



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“For in him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers” (Col. 1:15, 16).

All things, even the angels, were created *through and unto Christ*, and He also preserves them in existence.

Holy angels, defend us against the snares of the devil.

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Although they were created in the grace of God, the angels were not, by creation alone, confirmed in blessedness. Like us, they had to merit the vision of God by their fidelity in trial. For them as for us, heaven was to be a reward. Revelation does not tell us the nature of their trial, but it may be stated in a general way that it required the angels to make use of their liberty in recognizing God as their Sovereign Master and End and in submitting to Him. The result of the trial was that some of the angels submitted to God, while others, under the leadership of Lucifer, refused and so fell into grave sin which, we infer, was a sin of pride. If, according to a probable opinion, the trial of the angels was related to the mystery of the Incarnation, the hatred of Lucifer for the God-Man, whose union with the Second Person of the Divinity he coveted for himself, is readily explained; as also is his envy of human nature elevated in Jesus Christ to the dignity of union with God.

It would seem that a large portion of the angelic hosts followed Lucifer into apostasy, for Lucifer was a powerful spirit, holding, perhaps, one of the highest places in the celestial hierarchy. The sentence of divine Justice that was then passed upon the rebellious angels was immediate, terrible, and eternal. The obstinacy of their will in the light of the perfection of their knowledge aggravated their sin and made it an irreparable offense; they were given neither time nor grace for repentance. No beings in creation are more abased and more wretched than the fallen angels. They are confirmed in evil, forever excluded from heaven and condemned eternally to the double punishment of the damned. From being shining spirits in the heavenly court, they have become tempters of men. To deceive is their sole occupation; and how well they have done their work! Original sin was



occasioned by a fallen angel; and so, through their agency, a deluge of temporal misfortune flowed into the world. They have caused and they continue to cause appalling ravages in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But their efforts, in one sense, only further the designs of God. By temptation the wisdom of God and the power of His grace are glorified; man is given the opportunity to practice virtue and acquire merit; in the end, therefore, all turns to the shame and defeat of the tempter.

The angels who, under the leadership of St. Michael, resisted temptation and submitted to God were elevated after their trial to the immediate and eternal vision of Him. Their work is to advance the glory of God and man's salvation. They protect the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Everywhere in the Old and in the New Testaments we see them employed in the service of the Church and the God-Man for the accomplishment of His mysteries.

O holy angels, what great love we owe you for your faithful service of our Savior, your solicitude for the Church, and your many favors to all mankind! Continue to protect the holy Church and us from the hatred of evil spirits. Prosper our efforts for the salvation of souls and the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

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FEBRUARY 14

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*Man and His Creator*



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“You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet” (Ps. 8:6, 7).

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Man was created to serve God and in serving Him to save his soul; all else in the material universe has been made to aid man toward this end.

O God, assist the powers of my soul toward knowing, loving, and serving You, according to Your will.

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Since we are creatures of God's hands, we necessarily belong to Him and to Him alone, for no other being contributed to our existence except as an instrument of His power. We are to be His entirely, in thoughts, affections, words, and actions. We owe Him the service of every moment, since He is, as it were, ceaselessly creating us by preserving us in existence from moment to moment. Also, by fidelity in His service we repair our misuse of created things, which were made by God solely to assist us in serving Him and, ultimately, in gaining our salvation. By creatures are meant not only animate and inanimate nature, but also everything that exists outside of God: all that is comprised by the good things or the adversities of this life, as health, sickness, riches, poverty, pleasure, pain, honors, humiliations, temptations, friends, enemies. All without exception are to be used as the saints use them, that is, to glorify God and sanctify the soul.

All things, which God has created for His own greater glory and our benefit, are to be, as it were, a ladder whereby our souls may ascend to Him. The fundamental rule of the Christian life, as almost every page of the Gospel tells us, is that we should separate ourselves from the world. This does not mean that in order to be Christians we must live apart from our fellow men; on the contrary, our Savior Himself blessed and sanctified those ties which He has expressly willed should exist among us. And while He tells us to

flee the world, He also instructs us in our duties toward one another. St. Paul admonishes us to *use this world, as though not using it*; that is, it must not be the object of our hope. Many imprudently fix their hearts upon the world and not upon heaven; these persons our Savior calls by the name of the object of their love: "*not for the world do I pray,*" He said at the Last Supper. The world represents everything that is opposed to the absolute reign of our Lord Jesus Christ in our souls: false maxims which tend to weaken the love of God in us or to chill our fervor in serving Him; vanities that attach our hearts to this life; the dangerous gratification of our corrupt nature. This "world" is everywhere; it is secretly entrenched in our own hearts. We must conquer our attachment to it, or we shall perish with it. In this warfare there can be no neutrality.

O God, my Creator and Father, grant me a holy indifference to all created things, to all that can befall me in this world. Let me not desire riches rather than poverty, honor rather than disgrace, pleasure rather than pain, health rather than sickness. Deign to enlighten my understanding and move my will, so that I will fear sin alone and prefer in my use of creatures only that which will most surely and directly contribute to Your glory and my own salvation.

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## *The Fall of Our First Parents*

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“She took of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband and he ate” (Gen. 3:6).

The first sin committed on earth was related to the sin of the angels in that it was a sin of pride as well as of disobedience, and because man was drawn into his sin by a fallen angel.

O my God, grant me the grace of resolving efficaciously to avoid all occasions of sin.

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The devil, jealous of man's happiness, was determined to make man share in his revolt. With this purpose in view he took the form of a serpent and entered the garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve. First, he addressed himself to Eve, as being the weaker; and he directed the temptation to the powers of her soul, because, being exempt from concupiscence, her senses offered no point of attack. *“Did God say,”* asked the Tempter, *“‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’”* The question was a crafty one, for God had limited His prohibition to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil alone. Imprudently, Eve listened to him and replied. *“Of the fruit of all the trees in the garden we may eat,”* answered Eve; *“but ‘Of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden,’ God said, ‘you shall not eat, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*

Lucifer then took another step and aroused her pride and curiosity by a blasphemous falsehood: *“No, you shall not die; for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

Eve's craving to possess knowledge so high and so secret and to become herself a divinity was now awakened, and she completed her act of disobedience. The sacred text adds that the forbidden tree now appeared *pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for the knowledge it would give*. She ate of its fruit and gave some to Adam. From the time that Eve began to listen to the Tempter and to waver, she began also to lose the grace of God. Then concupiscence of the senses followed closely the disorder already introduced into her soul. She ate of the fruit, and the serpent was victor. Having well instructed his ambassadress, he might now leave the rest to seduced Eve.

By one stroke the serpent inflicted three great wounds. Pride entered with the words, "*you will be like God.*" The words "*knowing good and evil*" aroused curiosity, and the attention to the agreeable appearance of the fruit caused love of sense pleasure-to enter even into the marrow of the bones. Here are the three general maladies which are the cause of all the particular evils with which we are afflicted. St. John has brought them together in the words: *Do not love the world or the things that are in the world . . . because all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh* [that is, sensuality] *and the lust of the eyes* [that is, curiosity] *and the pride of life* [or ambition]. The triple concupiscence is our great battleground in the struggle for Christian and religious perfection. In order that the divine image may be restored within us, it is necessary to curb the life of the flesh by self-denial; the life of pride by obedience; and the life of ambition by humility.

"Come, my poor soul, and bewail this day thy deed. Think within thyself of that sin which made thee naked in Eden and robbed thee of delight and joy eternal. . . . Alas, miserable

am I! How came I not to know the snare? How was it that I suspected not the enemy's craft and envy? My soul was darkened and I set at naught my Creator's command. (O most venerable One, my hope and refuge, who by giving birth to Jesus covered the nakedness of fallen Adam! Clothe me, too, O Virgin, with this incorruptible garb)" (from a hymn of the Greek liturgy lamenting the fall of Adam).

FEBRUARY 16

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### *The Divine Sentence*



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"But the Lord God called the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9)

Represent to yourself guilty Adam hiding with Eve in the forests of paradise.

O my God, grant me a deeper knowledge of the malice of sin and the grace to fear sin alone.

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The first effect of Adam's disobedience was shame; for when God called him, he hid himself because he saw that he was naked. This, then, was the knowledge that the serpent had promised when he said, "your eyes will be opened." They are opened, but Adam sees only his own nakedness. Until his sin Adam's body had been veiled with the mantle of innocence, but his disobedience tore away this covering. Now, feeling his flesh in revolt against the spirit, he is covered with confusion. Fear also is a sentiment familiar to the sinner, and Adam now experiences this emotion for the first time. "*I heard you in the garden,*" he said, "*and I was*

*afraid.*" Eve had not feared the voice of the serpent, from which she should have fled instantly in alarm. But the voice of the Creator, who, before their act of disobedience, had conversed with Adam and Eve as a father with his children, now fills them with terror. They see in Him now only a stern, relentless Judge. Thus it is that sin causes us to lose our peace, and the very thought of God inspires fear instead of the confidence we formerly had in His goodness.

The judgment pronounced upon our first parents by the Creator was to fall upon their children until the end of time. Forgiveness was promised, but atonement had to be made. It was necessary for future generations to learn from experience that sin can never go unpunished. The first and severest sentence was passed against the serpent, the guiltiest of the three. His malice and hatred had succeeded in ruining all humanity in Adam and Eve, in spoiling God's original plan for men. He had desired to see poor humanity subject to him and cowering at his feet; and so, for the second time, divine Justice struck him down with a chastisement that was most wounding to his pride. Through a woman he had brought about man's ruin; by a woman and her seed he should himself be vanquished. Eve's sentence followed: she was to bring forth her children in pain, and although created to enjoy equality of honor with man, she must now forfeit her independence. Man was to be her superior, and she must obey him. Man, for his part, was condemned to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow. And both Adam and Eve with all their progeny would return to the earth whence their bodies had been formed.

"O Christ, my Savior, my hope is in Thy great mercy, and in the blood which flowed from Thy sacred side, whereby Thou didst sanctify mankind and open, O good Jesus, to those who

serve Thee, the gate of paradise, heretofore shut against Adam (O Gate of life, spiritual Gate, which God has kept for Himself! Virgin Mother of God, espoused to none but Him, open to me by thy prayers the gate of heaven once closed to men, so that I may glorify thee, who after God are my helper and sure refuge)" (from a hymn of the Greek liturgy lamenting the fall of Adam).

FEBRUARY 17

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## *The Law of Work*



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"In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (Gen. 3:19).

These words of the Lord God condemned man to labor as a punishment for his disobedience.

O God, grant me the grace of always laboring meritoriously.

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In pronouncing the sentence of labor upon the first man, God decreed a general law which was to apply to all of Adam's posterity. We are again reminded of this in the Book of Ecclesiasticus where the Holy Spirit says, *A great anxiety has God allotted, and a heavy yoke to the sons of men; . . . whether he sits on a lofty throne or grovels in dust and ashes.* All men were included in Adam's malediction; we all must perform the penance of labor pronounced upon him, for we all sinned in Adam. The grace of Baptism removes from our souls the stain of original sin, but it does not exempt us from paying the penalty. And the teachings of the Gospel, which continually speak of self-renunciation, fatigues, and the cross, are diametrically opposed to laziness and slothfulness.



Every state of life carries with it certain obligations whose fulfillment requires labor and effort. The perfection of our response to each obligation depends upon a certain course of conduct, a certain unvarying sequence of actions, and upon serious application of the mind. This means effort for man. But there is no condition of life wherein one is exempt from these necessities. Certainly, if we consider our vocation as religious, it is immediately evident that ceaseless effort is demanded of us both for the advancement of our own spiritual life and for the success of our apostolate. The divine decree that man shall eat bread only on condition that he works for it applies not merely to bodily effort, but also to the labor of the mind and the spirit. We cannot "feed" our minds or our souls any more than our bodies without labor. It may be said as truly of the soul as of the body, *if any man will not work, neither let him eat*. The divine authority with which the Church teaches us revealed truths is not meant to save us the trouble of thinking for ourselves. These truths will have a life-giving power of nourishing the soul only when we have made them our own through meditation and the spiritual exercise of faith. If we wish to feed upon the bread of life, we must labor and exercise ourselves in the spiritual combat. Lack of exercise may often explain our want of appetite for spiritual things.

Furthermore, no useful purpose will be served by all our fatigue if we do not consult God's good pleasure and take His will as our rule of life rather than our whims or moods or natural inclinations. On the last day our Savior will reply to certain laborers in His vineyard who will allege their work in His service, "*I know you not*"; for they will have consulted not His will but their personal desires. Too late will they cry out with the Apostles who had cast their nets

all night in vain, "*The whole night through we have toiled and have taken nothing.*" Let us maintain ourselves, then, not only in the state of grace, but in fervor and in that close union with God which will enable us to act in all things for His love.

O my God, never permit me to evade the sacred duty of work, whether of mind, soul, or body. Grant me the grace of performing all the duties of my state as perfectly as possible, in closest union with Jesus, my divine Model.

FEBRUARY 18

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### *The Effects of the Fall*



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"Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and thus death has passed into all men because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

All mankind sinned in Adam and with him were disfigured by the fall.

O Mother of my Redeemer, obtain for me that I may be daily more cleansed from guilt and more enriched with the grace of your Son.

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On the part of Adam original sin was an actual and deliberate transgression of the command of God forbidding our first parents to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This command Adam violated by allowing himself to be persuaded by Eve, who was herself already mortally blameworthy. The revolt of Adam and Eve against their Creator was the gravest offense ever committed by man. It comprised

within itself all crimes in that it engendered in the human race that concupiscence which produces all iniquity. By it Adam caused not only his own death and the death of Eve, in not urging her to repentance that could have saved her, but that of all his offspring even before their birth. Original sin caused the death of our soul through the loss of sanctifying grace and also through the forfeiting of all the privileges connected with original justice.

Not only had God created man to His image and likeness and given him a soul immortal by nature as his body was by privilege, but He had also enriched him with His grace, whereby man became the adopted child of God. He was endowed besides with faith, hope, and charity, with infused knowledge, and with all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. All man's natural wants were provided for and even his desire for pleasure, but his flesh was subordinate to his spirit and his spirit to the Creator. Furthermore, man was not to know death, but was to be one day transported bodily from the terrestrial to the heavenly paradise. As a consequence of Adam's fall, we were driven out of paradise with him, despoiled of the title "Children of God," and also of all the rights of our heavenly inheritance.

The merits of our merciful Savior rescued us from eternal death; but as long as our exile lasts we shall be weak and sickly. Ignorance makes us dull in comprehending the great truths of faith which should be completely engrossing our minds; in our darkened state we love and cling to illusions. Because our wills are weak and our intellects darkened, we may waste years in the external observance of a rule and the wearing of a religious habit, while failing to grasp the real purpose of the religious life: the union of our hearts and souls with God. Moreover, concupiscence is ever threatening

to enslave our soul to the body; our life must be, therefore, a continuous struggle against our rebellious appetites. The unruly love of independence ceaselessly urges us to be our own masters; we always tend to forget that we were born to obey. Worse than all, we find pleasure in committing sin while virtue, during this life, rewards us for the most part only with the consciousness that we have acted as we ought.

Be ever blessed, O my God, for all the favors You prepared for us in Adam and which I should now be enjoying if sin had not prevented. Be ever thanked by angels and men for Your goodness in granting me and all mankind so many favors in place of those first blessings, of which we were deprived through our own fault. Be a thousand times thanked and praised, O Jesus, our Redeemer, for becoming incarnate and dying for us on the cross in order to save us from eternal death. Through Your mercy, even the penalties which remain to us in this present life can become a source of merit and eternal glory. Forgive me my abuse of Your gifts in deliberately committing sin and help me from now on to accomplish in all things Your good pleasure.

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FEBRUARY 19

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*The Deluge*



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“For all men lived corruptly on the earth” (Gen. 6:12).

Represent to yourself the human race being destroyed by the deluge, with the exception of Noah and his family.

O God, inspire me with that fear which is the beginning of wisdom.

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In her office for the week of Sexagesima, the Church offers to our consideration the history of Noah and the deluge. This terrible chastisement of the human race was a fresh consequence of sin. The dread lesson of Eden had been forgotten. Only one just man, Noah, was found among the children of Adam. The example of Adam's nine hundred years of penance and the admonitions he must have so feelingly given, had lost their effect upon his descendants; and, as time went on, they grew more and more heedless of their obligations to their Creator. Yet they, as well as we, had the power to resist their evil propensities. The merits of the Redeemer to come were even then present to divine Justice. The blood of the Lamb, *slain*, as St. John says, from the beginning of the world, was applicable in its merits to them as to every generation which existed before the divine Victim was really immolated on Calvary. Each individual of the human family might have been *just* as Noah was, and like him might have found favor with the Most High, but *man's every thought and all the inclination of his heart were only evil.*

In reminding us of these ancient times, holy Mother Church exhorts us to turn our thoughts to our own amendment. The pages of the Holy Scripture which describe so vividly the opening of the floodgates of heaven and the descending of the waters of the deluge upon the guilty earth are read at her direction; that we may take a salutary warning and examine our own consciences. Yesterday we considered the sad consequences of Adam's sin, a sin which we did not commit, yet whose effects lie heavily upon us. Today we should reflect upon our own personal sinfulness, upon the offenses we have committed and daily continue to commit against the God who overwhelms us with His favors. We

have the happiness of being Christians and especially privileged children of the Church. The light of faith and the power of divine grace, particularly the grace of our vocation, have united us by the most intimate bonds to our Creator. But we are surely not so confirmed in virtue that we may promise ourselves perseverance until the end in our privileged state. Well may we reflect upon and heed the inspired counsel of David: *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him; with trembling pay homage to him, lest he be angry and you perish from the way, when his anger blazes suddenly.*

The deluge was a terrible effect of the divine wrath, but God willed at the same time to make His mercy shine forth also in the figure of the future salvation of the human race. The deluge cleansed the earth and renewed it; it was an image of Baptism. *In that ark*, writes St. Peter, *a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water. Its counterpart, Baptism, now saves you also (not the putting off of the filth of the flesh, but the inquiry of a good conscience after God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* God does not send us misfortune without sending us also consolation. His goodness always accompanies His vengeance. Let us fear to abuse the paternal goodness of our merciful Father who wills only to pardon. “Graciously hear us, O Lord our God, and forgetting man’s iniquity, remember only Thy own mercy. Graciously hear us, we beseech Thee, O Thou who forbiddest us to sin, who commandest us to repent, who permittest us to pray. . . . May our sacrifice find favor in Thy eyes; our sins, pardon; our words, healing; our sighs, pity; our chastisements, consolation; our tears, joy; our days, peace; our duties, honor; our prayers, reward” (from a prayer from the Mozarabic Missal).

*Mortal Sin*



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“Know thou, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God” (Jer. 2:19).

Sin is an act of the most culpable disobedience, the most monstrous ingratitude, the greatest of insults to the divine Majesty. O Adam and Eve, my first parents, intercede for me that I may profit as you did by my past sins, and never again offend God seriously.

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What is mortal sin? It is a grave and voluntary transgression of the law of God in a serious matter; that is to say, it is a violation of the most just, the holiest, the most benevolent law that could be conceived of. Mortal sin, therefore, constitutes an act of criminal injustice; for there cannot be the slightest reasonable excuse for disobeying a God who commands only that which is wise and good. It represents, besides, an incredible audacity, in that the sinner, an atom in the universe, dares to resist the will of the sovereign Creator, whose power is limitless and whose justice is omniscient and terrible.

In order to appreciate in some slight degree the enormity of such an act, let us consider the following great truths of our faith:

1. For a single sin of pride, God cast down from heaven to hell the rebellious angels, who had been His noblest creatures.

2. For a single act of disobedience God expelled Adam from the terrestrial paradise and deprived him of all the privileges

of the state of innocence and condemned him and all his posterity to labor, sickness, and death. In punishment for this one sin, we all became "children of wrath."

3. To expiate the original sin of disobedience the Eternal Son of God became man and suffered and died on the cross.

4. For an offense which can be committed in the flash of an instant there is prepared an eternity of suffering.

Such is mortal sin; but all sin is in itself an act of monstrous ingratitude. Where is the sinful soul to whom Infinite Truth cannot say, "What ought I to have done for thee that I have not done?" Let us consider only some of the favors we have received. In Baptism we were made children of the Eternal Father and heirs of His kingdom; but perhaps love of self and of the world has weakened our attachment to God. He nourishes us daily with the Body and Blood of His Son; how do we show our gratitude? In Confirmation He strengthened in us the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, but do we not often grieve the Holy Spirit by resisting His inspirations? He gave us an intellect with which to know Him, a heart with which to love Him, and a body with which to work for Him. Yet how often our minds and hearts are taken up with unworthy thoughts and affections and our bodily members employed to commit sin!

*Have pity on me, O God; have pity on me, for in you I take refuge. In the shadow of your wings I take refuge, till harm pass by. I call to God the Most High, to God my benefactor (Ps. 56:1-3).*



*Venial Sin*



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“Keep yourselves from every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22).

Imagine that you hear the Apostle of the Gentiles addressing these words to you.

O God, grant me a conscience which avoids even the shadow of sin, and which abhors especially the habit of venial sin.

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Venial sin is so named, not because it is slight in itself, but only in comparison with mortal sin. All sin, of whatever degree of gravity, offends the infinite majesty of God. Seen in this light, every such offense is a greater evil than all the material misfortune it is possible to imagine; even the annihilation of the entire physical universe. This being true, it follows that the offended majesty of God must be avenged. All sin, therefore, however slight it may be, must be punished either in this life or in the next. Some of the penalties for sin recorded in the Old Testament illustrate in a frightening manner the malice in God's sight of what we should consider venial offenses. Moses was forbidden to enter the promised land because he had hesitated to strike the rock from which the miraculous water gushed forth. Osee was struck dead for having touched the swaying Ark of the Covenant to steady it. Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the feet of St. Peter when they attempted to deceive him by withholding part of the sum of money received from the sale of their property. By this scale we may judge of the expiation which divine Justice exacts in purgatory from souls that are stained with

a single deliberate venial sin. But surely the thought that sin offends the good God, and that the slightest defilement keeps the soul from His presence, should itself deter us from committing deliberate sin.

Above all, we should fear and avoid the habit of venial sin; for a succession of easy and repeated falls leads to tepidity and paves the way for the loss of divine grace. Our Communions become less fruitful and we commit mortal sin more readily; either because we do not merit the light to see the nature of the sin committed, or because we have abused the graces given us to strengthen us against temptation. Our Savior Himself warns us that *he who is unjust in a very little thing is unjust also in much*. O wonderful dignity of our human nature! We cannot be indifferent to the God who created us. We must be either His friends or His enemies. "We must bear either the wounds of Adam or the wounds of Christ." It could not be otherwise. God has given us understanding and free will; we can know what is good and what is evil and choose one or the other. If we choose the good, God turns toward us in love; if evil, we ourselves draw away from Him who is our Sovereign Good. Laying aside the burden of sin, let us run with constancy in the way open to us, our eyes fixed on Jesus the Rewarder of our faith, who, to do His Father's will, endured the sorrows of the cross.

"Come, be converted unto me, saith the Lord. Let us come weeping and pour out our tears before God, for we have been negligent, and because of us is the earth suffering. We have committed iniquity, and because of us are the foundations of the world moved. Let us hasten to convert the wrath of God; let us weep and say, O Thou who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" (prayer from the Ambrosian Missal).

*The First Dolor of Our Lady*



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“And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce’” (Lk. 2:34, 35).

The words of holy Simeon constituted the first of the seven dolours of our Lady. Although she already knew in general the mission and the fate which awaited her Son, this revelation was so definite and precise that it filled her whole heart with sharp and living grief.

O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, obtain for me patience under the trials of this life.

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Simeon told Mary explicitly that her Son was to be *a sign that shall be contradicted*. Her Jesus, then, was to meet hostility and be destroyed by His own whom He had come to save. And beneath the words of the holy old man, Mary discovered depths of which he knew nothing. She had heard the announcement of the archangel that by the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing power of the Most High, she was to conceive and bear the Child who would be the *Holy One* and who should be called the *Son of God*. She had heard the voice of Elizabeth saluting her as the Mother of the Lord and the message of the angels to the shepherds: “*For there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*” All these words Mary had kept and pondered in her heart and each of them had illuminated with its own light the mystery God had accom-

plished in her. Even in Bethlehem she must have understood how He had *come unto his own and his own received him not*; and now there was this prophecy of Simeon overwhelming her with its bitterness.

Yet from the added words of Simeon, "*And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*" Mary now knew with certainty that she was to be divinely associated with her Son in His sufferings. She also began to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of our redemption and what it would cost her and her Son. It is difficult for us to understand what these lights meant to our Lady, these advances in the knowledge of how she was to merit her glorious titles "Queen of Martyrs" and "Mother of Sorrows." In His tender care for our weakness, God conceals the trials which await us, so that, whatever they may be, we may have to endure them only once; but Mary, whom God willed to be in all things like her Son, had to see always before her eyes and continually to suffer the torments that lay ahead—the sufferings of the passion and death of her beloved Jesus.

This fear and dread, inconceivably greater than any we shall or could ever feel, overcast her whole life; yet we see in Mary no shrinking or sense of hopelessness. Even when she sang her *Magnificat* in exaltation and divine gladness, Mary was not ignorant of her destiny of sorrow. But courage, strength, and joy continued to sustain her in her pain. She was joyous in caring for Jesus in Nazareth, she took part in the wedding feast at Cana. Never for a moment did Mary lose sight of the cross, but she saw also the Resurrection beyond the cross. Let us ask her to give us something of her trust in Him who is mighty, that we may share also her courage and her joy.

I grieve for you, O Mary most sorrowful, in the affliction of your

maternal heart at the prophecy of holy Simeon. Dear Mother, by your heart so afflicted, obtain for me a never failing confidence in you and in Jesus and the virtues of patience and fortitude in times of trial.

FEBRUARY 23

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## *Temptation*



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“My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials” (Ecclus. 2:1).

Again in the Book of Job the Holy Spirit warns us that *the life of man upon earth is a warfare*. It would be a mistake for us to think that there is another way to heaven than continuous struggle against temptation.

Divine Savior, help me to overcome temptation by detecting and resisting its first attacks.

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Our temptations may be occasioned by the devil, by the world, or by our own selves; or they may come in connection with the trials sent us by God. Almighty God tries man in order to increase His own glory by the added merits of the soul who is victorious in trial. He tested Abraham, for example, by asking of him the sacrifice of his son, Isaac; and then He contented Himself with Abraham's good will. Job He tried by permitting the devil to afflict him with the greatest adversities; and then He rewarded Job's patience by restoring to him his health, his family, and redoubled riches. He allowed Tobias to become blind while engaged in an act of charity, but later his sight was

restored, and God said to him through the archangel Raphael, "*because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should try thee.*"

The devil also tries us but his purpose is to bring about our eternal ruin. The spirits of darkness, incomparably mightier and more intelligent than we, are tireless in their subtle and deadly attacks. St. Anthony saw the traps set by the devils to catch men represented as pits and snares covering the whole earth. As in the temptation of Eve, they enter into our views, they pretend to care for our interests, they counsel us in the role of friends. To every argument of ours for resisting, they oppose a better one for yielding. Our only recourse is to answer them as Jesus did Satan, that is, with the word of God.

The world, too, or our love of the world, is a strong source of temptation for us. Unless we are constantly alert, we become infected little by little with the worldly spirit, until we end by esteeming and desiring the honors, riches, and pleasures it offers. Humiliations, poverty, and mortification then seem to us irksome and shameful and we no longer *walk in the spirit*. Since the fall, our body has been the enemy of the soul: *the flesh lusts against the spirit*; and the seeds of bad inclinations which are in every child of Adam, we nourish and foster by our own sins. Yet, if we should yield to temptation, let us not be discouraged, but as a precaution against falling again, let us take the advice of St. Anthony to his disciples: "Believe me, Satan dreads above all else the prayers, vigils, and penances of God's servants."

*O Lord of hosts, hear my prayer; hearken, O God of Jacob! O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of your anointed. I had rather one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere;*

*I had rather lie at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For a sun and a shield is the Lord God; grace and glory he bestows; the Lord withholdeth no good thing from those who walk in sincerity. O Lord of hosts, happy the men who trust in you! (Ps. 83:9-13.)*

FEBRUARY 24

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### *Lukewarmness*



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“But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth” (Apoc. 3:16).

St. John the Beloved was divinely inspired to address these words to the Bishop of Laodicea.

O my God, enable me to recognize in myself the first signs of willful tepidity and instantly to apply the means of renewing my fervor.

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What occasioned the terrifying rebuke recorded in the Apocalypse as addressed to a bishop? The mortal sin of sacrilege or apostasy? Not at all. “*I know thy works,*” divine inspiration bade St. John write; “*thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.*” Lukewarmness, then, is the offense at which God has been pleased to express so forcibly His ineffable disgust. The mere mention of mortal sin is sufficient to awaken fear and dread in us, but who is deeply moved when venial sin is spoken of? Tepidity and lukewarmness tend to be regarded by us almost with indiffer-

ence, but mark the judgment of the Holy Spirit. The expression used by the inspired writer is the strongest our language can suggest: "*I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.*"

What is lukewarmness? To be either cold or hot, in the language of the Holy Spirit, is to be either frozen and dead in mortal sin or on fire with divine love. To be lukewarm, then, is to be neither in a state of mortal sin nor yet in the ardor of charity. Could it be that it were better for us to be cold, that is, entirely deprived of divine grace, than to live in tepidity? The Holy Spirit expressly affirms this. And why? Because we rise more quickly from a sudden fall than from a half-slumbering and gradual descent. According to St. Vincent de Paul, real and deliberate lukewarmness, which should be distinguished from semivoluntary or apparent tepidity, is languor of the will and sloth of mind in that which God requires of us. A characteristic mark of culpable lukewarmness is the habit of committing willful venial faults, such as jealousy, impatience, criticism, almost without remorse. There is in the lukewarm soul a gradual decrease in the love of prayer, a ready facility in omitting exercises of piety, and carelessness in performing those that are observed. Little by little, charity cools, fervor is extinguished, virtue grows weak. The conscience becomes a false guide and its bad instincts lead the soul to shrink from vigorous spiritual direction.

As long as we live, we are in danger of losing the spirit of recollection, which is essential for close union with God. Human nature is ever with us and we easily become too much engrossed in our external occupations; the frequent renewal of fervor is, therefore, necessary for our religious life. The particular examen offers us daily the opportunity



of examining the manner in which we make our vocal and mental prayer, whether we are profiting by our spiritual reading, whether amendment follows our reception of the Sacrament of Penance, and whether devotion accompanies our Communion. We should never think of the good we have done, but rather of the good we have left undone. Let us not calculate the sacrifices we have made, nor compare ourselves with the people of the world, but with the great saints of the monastic life. Our spirit should be that of St. Paul who said, *forgetting what is behind, I strain forward to what is before. I press on towards the goal, to the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.*

O Jesus, preserve me from tepidity in Your service. Grant me a sincere will to pray with attention, to obey in the spirit of faith, to amend in earnest my habitual faults. Help me to prove by my daily conduct the reality of my love for You.

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FEBRUARY 25

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### *Carrying the Cross*



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“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’” (Mt. 16:24).

This is the first time that our Savior preached openly to the people the doctrine of the cross. However, His whole instruction on this occasion was not given to the crowd. They were not present for the prediction of the Passion which immediately preceded these words on the necessity of self-denial. The people in general

were even less prepared than the disciples for the revelation of a suffering Messias.

O Jesus, teach me to carry my cross as all Your saints carry theirs, in imitation of You.

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To deny oneself in order to follow Christ is to renounce self-interest, to become nothing in one's own eyes, to be oblivious of one's own interests, reputation, and aspirations in order to embrace the interests of Christ, to live only for His service and His glory. It implies readiness to sacrifice the life of the body, if necessary, in bearing heroic witness to the faith and the gospel before unbelievers. By the "cross" is meant all contradictions, all difficulties, interior and exterior, spiritual, moral, or physical.

The first reason our Savior gives us for obeying this precept to deny self and carry our cross after Him is a most compelling one: obedience to it is the indispensable condition for being His disciple. This condition applies to all men without exception, for Jesus spoke in a general way: "*If anyone wishes to come after me,*" He said. Moreover, so that all might hear, He had called the crowd together to join His disciples, as St. Mark tells us, before giving this instruction. Failing this requirement, then, no conformity, whether interior or exterior, can be achieved between the life and spirit of the disciple and the life and spirit of the Master. What a powerful motive this should be for us, especially when we compare the cross we are invited to carry with the cross our Savior had to bear! Furthermore, carrying the cross is a necessary condition even for the salvation of our souls. The ownership of the whole world could not be compared with this pre-eminent good, nor could any other possession, even one whose loss is irreparable as, for

example, life itself. Indeed, unless we are prepared to sacrifice the life of our body in order to save our souls, we shall not save them. To preserve bodily life by renouncing Jesus Christ either through an outright denial of our faith or by refusing to follow Him daily in the way of self-denial is to lose the life of the soul.

Again, the manner in which we carry our cross will determine our share in the kingdom of Jesus Christ and in His glory. The reward, it should be noted, is emphasized by our Savior, who shows us in this way that the cross is not an end in itself, but an indispensable means for attaining the glory and happiness of being His disciples. The complete glorification of Jesus will take place at the Last Judgment when He will come in the glory of His Father and accompanied by His holy angels. Then He will be revealed to all as the Son of God and the Lord of heaven and we shall all participate in His glory according to our works. But whoever has been ashamed of the Son of Man and of His words, of him will the Son of Man then be ashamed.

Your spirit, then, my Jesus, is the spirit of the cross and of sacrifice. You tell me this plainly. I must make my choice: either renunciation of the spirit of the world and of self or rejection by You when You come in Your glory. By Your grace, good will is not wanting to me, dear Jesus, but my courage fails so often, and I find the path of self-denial very difficult and painful. Help me in Your mercy and keep always before my eyes Your great promise that I shall surely be with You if I follow in Your footsteps. The saints found the way of the cross borne for Your sake even sweet and delightful; enable me to learn their secret.

*Ash Wednesday*



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“For dust you are and unto dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

When the Church decreed the anticipation of the Lenten fast by the last four days of Quinquagesima Week, she instituted the ceremony of signing the foreheads of her children with ashes, while repeating to them the dread sentence of God, “Remember, O man, that you are dust, and into dust you shall return.”

O my God, help me to keep always before my mind the consciousness of my mortality and the eternal destiny that awaits me.

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During the six weeks which prepare for Easter, the Church wishes us to walk a more austere path and to meditate more frequently upon the passion and death of our Savior. In order to deepen the seriousness with which we shall enter the holy season of Lent, she reminds us a little in advance how transient life is, by showing us how it ends—in a few ashes. But her grave warning that we shall return to the dust from which we were made has another purpose than that merely of reminding us of our mortality. The chief aim of the Church in her rite of Ash Wednesday is to lead us to think of that part of ourselves which is immortal. For this reason mainly, she reminds us of the passing nature of all that is earthly—the life of sense and the enjoyment we take in earthly things. We are inclined to attach ourselves foolishly to the goods of this life; and so the Church shows us what will ultimately remain of them, some ashes produced by the universal conflagration. Certain things

in our life have already been reduced to ashes; it will be the same with the rest.

The ashes placed on our foreheads have still another signification. They are a mark of penance. The use of ashes as a symbol of humiliation and penance is of a very early date. There is frequent mention of it in the Old Testament. Many centuries before the coming of Christ, Job, although a Gentile, sprinkled himself with ashes in order to propitiate divine Justice. King David tells us that he mingled ashes with his bread because of the divine *anger and indignation*. There is, indeed, an evident correspondence between the sinner and this symbol of his remorse. Fallen man, wishing to humble himself before God, could scarcely express more aptly his contrite acceptance of the divine sentence decreeing his return to dust, than by sprinkling himself or his food with ashes, the "dust" of burned wood.

When the priest places the holy symbol of penance on our heads today, we should make an interior act of submission to the sentence of death which God Himself pronounced upon us: "*for dust you are and unto dust you shall return.*" We should make an act of humility as we reflect upon what it was that brought the punishment of death upon us. Man wished to be as a god, and preferred his own will to that of his Creator. Then, remembering the many sins which we have added to the sin of our first parents, let us thank and adore the divine Mercy.

*But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook the sins of men that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord and lover of souls (Wisd. 11:23-26).*

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*Co-operation With Grace*

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“But now set free from sin and become slaves to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and as your end, life everlasting” (Rom. 6:22).

In this Epistle, St. Paul tells the Romans that they will be saints and will obtain eternal life if they will serve justice with as much earnestness as they once served uncleanness and iniquity. Divine Master, teach me to appreciate the eternal value of every passing moment of my life.

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“*No man can serve two masters,*” said our Savior, and St. Paul repeats this truth in his Epistle to the Romans. We must be either the servants of sin or the servants of justice. The former servitude leads to death, the latter to everlasting life and happiness. Our unhappiness even in this life, indeed, comes from our want of logic in allowing ourselves, by deliberate concessions to our weakness, to belie the name of Christian, the name of religious. What lessons we can learn from observing the industry of the votaries of this world in their pursuit of honor, advancement, and pleasure! It is conceivable that there are lost souls who have endured greater fatigue and pain in procuring their damnation, than even the martyrs endured for Christ; and perhaps, after all, they failed to achieve that which they sought for in this world. Each day, each moment of this present life, offers us the opportunity of proving our love for God and our gratitude to Him. Every virtuous action prepares our soul for the “gift of God” which is eternal life. If only we fully grasped

the significance of this truth, how zealous we should be in every good work!

The just man cannot remain stationary in this world; whatever may be the degree of perfection to which grace has led him, he must ever be ascending as long as he lives on this earth — or fall back. The stream of divine grace which began to flow in us on the day of our Baptism can go on increasing until, according to our state and our capacity, we reach the *mature measure of the fullness of Christ*. The follower of Christ may not remain content with being in grace, he must advance in grace; for the law of growth holds in the realm of grace as in the realm of nature. But, whereas in the natural order there is an inevitable process of decline, once maturity has been reached, this is not the case in the supernatural life. It can grow and strengthen in us for as long as our years on this earth continue. But when God shall call us to Himself, we become fixed forever in the degree of charity which we have up to that time attained; and according to this measure will be determined the degree of our beatitude for all eternity.

Every good act that proceeds from the deliberate will under the influence of infused divine charity merits an increase in the degree of the Beatific Vision, which is to be the reward of the members of Christ in eternity. The possession of God in the Beatific Vision is not essentially different from our union with Him by grace. Every moment of life, therefore, is infinitely precious. Our Savior stressed the value of these passing moments when He said, "*Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume.*" Every action in which union with God through love is not achieved or aimed at is a lost act; furthermore, our happiness here below as well as our

degree of happiness in eternity depends upon our constant efforts to achieve this union. We can be happy only when we are living in accordance with the purpose for which we were created.

O my God, I implore You to inspire me with great ardor in Your service. Enable me by Your grace to strive as earnestly for holiness of life as the servants of this world do for the satisfaction of their earthly desires. Grant, by Your mercy, that I may finally win that gift of Yours which is life everlasting in the ages of ages, the world without end; for eternal life is truly Your gift, since "in crowning our good works, You but crown Your own grace."

FEBRUARY 28

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### *Conditions of Discipleship*



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"Now great crowds were going along with him. And he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'" (Lk. 14:25, 26).

Since the final departure of our Savior from Galilee, the Passion and the Cross had become ever more vividly present to His mind, for the moment was fast approaching when He would go to Jerusalem for His last celebration of the Passover. Now was the proper time, therefore, to make unmistakably clear the conditions for becoming followers of Him. In this passage St. Luke gives us two: love for Jesus must prevail over love of relatives, no matter how intimate the degree of kinship; it must also transcend our love of ourselves and of our own life.



O Jesus, grant me a deeper understanding of the renunciation I have pledged in taking the vows of religion.

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Our Savior wished no one to be left in ignorance of the sacrifice which alone would entitle him to citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. His teaching on this point may be summed up in the phrase, "complete detachment." We do not become disciples, Jesus wishes us to understand, by only coming to Him, that is, by believing in Him and following after Him like the crowd whom He addressed on this occasion. We must, in addition, have resolved upon complete renunciation, and He Himself explained the nature of this renouncement in the word *hate*. To *hate* in the sense of our Savior's teaching here means to subordinate all else to the holy will of God, to regard as an enemy every person or thing that becomes an obstacle to us in the accomplishment of the will of God and to the faithful performance of our duty toward Him. To practice such renunciation is to carry the cross after Jesus. The cross stands for all griefs, humiliations, disappointments, all temporal ills, great and small, and, finally, death itself. The two expressions, to *hate* and to *carry the cross*, signify, therefore, a readiness for all sacrifices, negative or positive, the abandonment either in affection or in actuality of all that we possess, of all that concerns us, the sacrifice of life itself, if this be required; in short, they represent the habitual disposition of a willed acceptance of all that can be painful to the human heart.

Let us observe, also, with what force and vigor of language Jesus lays His terms before us. The alternative is presented in an unqualified manner: either the candidate for discipleship meets His terms or "*he cannot be my disciple.*" This statement is then twice repeated, so that His words will

escape no one, so that there can be no misunderstanding. Moreover, our Savior was not addressing the Apostles only here, but also the crowd gathered around Him. *Now great crowds were going along with him, says St. Luke. And he turned and said to them . . .* This full renunciation is, therefore, a necessary condition not only for the apostolic life, but also for the life of all faithful Christians. Then Jesus proceeded to show, by the two comparisons of a man building a tower and a king carrying on a war, that transient enthusiasm is not sufficient. Such projects are laborious and costly; it must first be prudently determined whether the necessary amount of money or the required number of troops are at hand to build a tower or prosecute a war, so that shame, defeat, or a dishonorable peace may not be the consequence. The money and the troops represent the determination to practice Christian abnegation and to carry the cross in order to become a disciple of Jesus. Such determined readiness is indispensable for victory, since at any moment the disciple of Christ may be called upon to show himself a very giant of heroism.

O divine Master, I have voluntarily embraced the life of the counsels. I have solemnly offered to You the total renunciation comprised by my three vows. How absolute should be my spirit, if all Your followers in general are called upon to resist any influence, however near and dear, that would be harmful to their spiritual welfare! Strengthen my will by Your grace, O Jesus, that I may keep the promise of my vows perfectly all the days of my life.

*The Second Dolor of Our Lady*




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“So he arose, and took the child and his mother by night, and withdrew into Egypt” (Mt. 2:14).

The accomplishment of Simeon’s prophecy began at once. The first fruits of the contradiction he had foretold was the Holy Family’s hurried flight from Herod’s fury into Egypt.

O Mother of Sorrows, obtain for me perfect detachment of the heart.

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Unlike the first Christmas Eve when the still unborn Child at least did not have to suffer physically, Mary was now unable to spare Him the hardships of the road, the night exposure, and the trials of hunger, thirst, and weariness. One may imagine how Mary’s own sufferings were increased by anxiety for her infant Son during this journey. The way was long and monotonous, the sun was hot on the sand by day, and at night cold winds swept the desert. Within Mary’s own heart an agony of fear was hidden as she implored the Eternal Father to save Jesus from Herod’s wrath.

Moreover, apart from the tormenting anxiety for Jesus’ safety that afflicted Mary, there was also, perhaps, the heart-breaking thought of the murder of the Innocents, of which echoes may easily have reached her. It must have seemed bewildering to Mary that already the *sign* was being opposed and spoken against. Her Jesus, banished from Bethlehem, was being forced to leave Judea; and He was bringing suffering even to those who, without knowing it, were acting as

His representatives. Yet Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Wisdom and Strength of God. Mary thought of those children who were dying for His sake and mourned and prayed for the grief-stricken mothers. Later on, when the Master will say, "*I have come to bring a sword, not peace,*" He will doubtless remember the sword of Herod, unsheathed because of Him.

All the circumstances of the flight into Egypt: the night, the darkness, the sudden preparations, and the departure into the unknown and the perilous, remind us that, like Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we must live as pilgrims here below. We must be wholly detached from this world's goods which, in any case, we must leave to enter eternity. This journey of the Holy Family is a symbol of evangelical poverty. We all need, we poor, banished children of Eve, a "flight into Egypt" in some form, that must be undertaken at once and by night. The poverty of spirit that we must strive for is this: to appreciate and use the things God has given us to complete our life, but to be ready to give them back to Him if He asks for them—at once and not grudgingly, but readily and even gladly. And we must give them back thus even in darkness, when we do not see the reason for it and when their surrender makes the future seem dark. Blessed Veronica da Binasco, an Augustinian nun, was permitted to accompany in spirit Mary with the Infant Jesus and St. Joseph on their journey into Egypt. Afterward the divine Mother said to her, "Daughter, thou hast seen with how much difficulty we have reached his country; learn from this that no one receives graces without suffering." But if we would feel less keenly the sorrows of this life, we should pass through our land of exile with Jesus and Mary; "*Take the child and his mother.*"

O Mary most sorrowful, by the suffering you endured in that journey to Egypt, assist me in the journey which I am now making to eternity. As I go through the years, ever in danger that some hidden foe may snatch Jesus from my grasp, be watchful of me, and remind your Son of what you suffered for His sake, that He may protect me by His grace. And whenever temptation pursues me, O dearest Mother, let me hasten immediately to seek refuge in your arms.



MARCH-APRIL-MAY

LENT TO PENTECOST





*The Season of Lent*



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“And he was in the desert forty days and forty nights” (Mk. 1:13).

Following the example of our Savior’s forty days’ fast in the desert, the Church has appointed a fixed period in the year for the special practice of prayer and penance.

O Jesus, grant me ardor and perseverance in the works of penance.

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Our Savior goes before us on the holy path of Lenten penance. He bore all its fatigues and hardships, so that when we would be called upon to tread that narrow way, we might silence the excuses and repugnances of self-love by remembering His example. The lesson He has set before us is too plain to be misunderstood; penance for sin is a law, and we cannot plead ignorance of it, nor excuse ourselves from it. The work of penance consists essentially in contrition of the soul and mortification of the body. Our soul has willed sin, and the body has frequently co-operated in its commission. There cannot be earnest penitence nor a thoroughly Christian life, where body and soul, but especially the latter, do not take up together the work of expiation.

There are three eminently good works which are at the same time works of penance. These are prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds. The Church herself redoubles her prayers of supplication during this season; it is for us she offers them. Should we not, then, during this time of special grace, cast off the spiritual indolence and languor which so often

envelop our souls? The dispositions which should accompany our fasting are described for us in the Lesson read in the Mass on Friday of Quinquagesima Week. God Himself tells us through the prophet Isaias that fasting from material food is useless in His eyes, unless it is accompanied by abstention also from sin. Corporal sacrifice is required, but it is unacceptable without sacrifice of the soul, that is, amendment of life. As for the third of the great penitential works, almsgiving, the Church places before us in the Gospel of Quinquagesima Friday the instructions of our Savior regarding it. He imposes upon us the duty of loving all our fellow men, whether friends or enemies, for His sake. When we perform acts of kindness or mercy toward our brethren in Christ, we offer to God a most acceptable homage. These acts are works of penance, because they often involve certain privations; and they force us to overcome our natural repugnances when they include all persons, without exception.

Forty days of penance are surely little enough to atone for our many negligences in the service of God. But our courage would not last even for this length of time unless we had Jesus with us. He prays with us, fasts with us, and does our works of mercy with us. Let us keep our eyes fixed upon Him; and when we grow tired, let us go to Him like the sick of whom St. Mark says that they *entreated him to let them touch but the tassel of his cloak; and as many as touched him were saved.* As we come into contact with the infinite sanctity of Jesus each morning in Holy Communion, let us ask Him to invigorate us by His grace and perfect His reign in our souls. Moreover, we should look beyond ourselves and the little world that surrounds us and include the whole Church in our offering of

the next forty days to the offended majesty of God. Let us ask Mary, the Refuge of sinners, to offer to the divine Majesty this year's atonement and to obtain repentance and pardon for all sinners.

"It behooves us, O most holy Virgin, to offer thee on the altar of our hearts the sacrifice of our prayers. For whereas the sacrifice of our prayers has no merit of its own, it may be made acceptable through thee to thy Son. Present to Him who was sacrificed for sin the sacrifice of sinners' prayers" (from a German Sequence of the fourteenth century).

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## MARCH 2

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### *Spiritual Service*



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"I exhort you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God—your spiritual service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed in the newness of your mind, that you may discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1, 2).

In the twelfth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul develops the theme of the Christian life as a sacrifice offered to God, giving us a rule for Christian living and a program of spiritual perfection.

O Jesus, help me to see the obstacles that I am placing in the way of Your will for my spiritual progress.

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If we are children of God and brethren of Christ, we must endeavor to banish from our souls all the character-

istics of the "old man" and to become as if "newborn." Herein lies the sacrifice of which St. Paul speaks. Our body becomes a sacrifice by renunciation of the world; our soul, by humility. Their union in sacrifice constitutes the perfect holocaust. The sacrifice offered by a member of Christ's Mystical Body must obviously be *living*, for there can be no dead members in Christ's living Body. Further, that which is incorporated into Christ and united to Him must necessarily be *holy* and *pleasing to God*. It is holy also because it is altogether surrendered to God and pleasing because it is the best we can give Him.

Our members, our senses, submissive to the spirit and subjected to the law of mortification under the action of grace, will become as a living host, constantly emitting the fragrance of works of penance and salvation. To the sanctification of our senses and members, we should add the immolation of all the powers of our intelligence, of our heart and of our affections. The disciple of Jesus Christ will not be conformed to this world; that is, he will not place his happiness in riches, honors, and pleasure and his unhappiness in suffering and privation. Dead to the "old man" and having renounced the spirit of the world in Baptism, he constantly studies in the school of the Gospel how to be purified and transformed in newness of mind, how to go from that which is good to that which is better, and finally to the highest perfection.

This living, holy sacrifice, pleasing to God, St. Paul calls a *spiritual service* because it derives its value from the dispositions of soul which accompany it. The sacrifice of the spirit is made when we overcome pride, anger, impatience, when we avoid willful distractions during prayer. Like David we should have a contrite and humble heart to present to

the Lord. This is a pleasing sacrifice in His sight and one He will never despise. And when St. Paul recommends the performance of a *spiritual service* in order that we may *discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God*, he is indicating that progress in the spiritual life which consists in the perfect fulfillment of the will of God, in the crown and completion of the sacrifice of body and soul which St. Paul so earnestly exhorts us to offer. May his desires for us not be left unfulfilled, that God may be glorified in us all!

“Lord, all things are Yours that are in heaven and upon earth. I desire to offer up myself to You as a voluntary oblation, and to remain forever Yours. Lord, in the simplicity of my heart I offer myself to You this day, as Your servant forevermore, for Your homage and for a sacrifice of perpetual praise” (*Imitation of Christ*).

MARCH 3

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## *Religious Perfection*



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“You, however, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may proclaim the perfections of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

These words of St. Peter are addressed to all the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, but they may be particularly applied to religious.

Divine Savior, grant that my observance of the Rule may be a source of strength to others and of blessing to my community.

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We have been received into our community as children into the embrace of their mother. She has shown us the way to heaven, she has inspired in us the desire for virtue and holiness, she has protected us from evil and elevated us to a sublime apostolate. Do not such benefits deserve our gratitude? Do they not, at least, merit that we do nothing to tarnish the glory or mar the beauty of our community? Her fate is in our hands. Our conduct can determine whether she will decline or prosper. Our personal good example will do more for community discipline, which is the basis of her prosperity, than all the discourses and advice vigilant superiors may give. How blessed and happy should we be, if our exactitude in observing all the points of rule and our persevering fervor were to gain for Christ a soul destined to save the souls of others! If our divine Master rewards a cup of cold water given in His name, how magnificent will be the recompense of the religious who by her good example saves souls!

In addition, the very existence of community happiness, which is to be found in peace with God and the union of hearts, is dependent upon our exactness in observing the various points of the Rule. This happiness can never be experienced in a place where order is continually disturbed. Oh, how blind and unworthy are those religious who place obstacles in the way of the general harmony! The scandal thus given is particularly great where the bad influence comes from those who by their age and rank are under a special obligation to foster union and give good example. To these religious I would say, "You are old in religion? Then you are more accustomed to the Rule and so its yoke should now seem sweet and light to you. You are old? You have, then, more sins to expiate and a greater

degree of holiness to acquire; therefore, you should observe the Rule better than others, for the Rule can be a sure and easy means of sanctification. You are old? Then you have received more favors from God and so you are under the obligation of showing Him your gratitude by obeying His will in the least things. You are old? You should be, then, a model to others of humility, mortification, recollection, punctuality.”

I conjure you, in the name of the founder of your community, who underwent many cares and difficulties, if you believe that you owe him some gratitude for opening to you this sacred refuge, be exact in observing the Rule he gave you and thus bring his blessing with you to your final judgment.

O Lord, perfect the work of Your wisdom by maintaining throughout our community the order You Yourself established therein. Deign to grant its members the grace of constant fidelity to the Rule that is its foundation and base. Then will our community be for all a place of happiness of which we may truly say, *Behold how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one! . . . It is a dew like that of Hermon, which comes down upon the mountains of Sion; for there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, life forever.*

MARCH 4

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### *Salt and Light*



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“You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13, 14).

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After proclaiming the eight beatitudes, our Savior turned to the Apostles and disciples to whom especially He had addressed them. Under the symbols of salt and light He indicated the nature of their apostolate and their obligation of faithfully fulfilling its duties; for the ideal proposed in the beatitudes was not to remain sterile theory; it was to be woven into the very texture of their lives.

Divine Savior, fill me with an awareness of the responsibilities that the religious state places upon me.

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The Christian, especially the religious engaged in apostolic work, serves spiritually as the salt of Jesus Christ; that is, the element in the world which is to preserve it from corruption and to enrich it. The Christian, the priest or religious, may possess qualities which make him attractive or useful in the eyes of the world; he may be an artist, a man of letters, or a scientist; but if he is not the salt of the earth, he is seriously deficient, a failure. Of him is expected above all and inexorably that supernatural virtue which, like salt, makes his works palatable to God and man—a true sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. By his teaching and the example of his life he should preserve souls from corruption. But this is only possible if through self-immolation he has made his own the virtue and sacrifice of the Savior, and has thus become the salt of Christ. When he ceases to perform this essential function, he is good for nothing and must be cast aside. Of what use is salt that has lost its savor! This comes to pass when an admixture of the spirit of the world has altered the doctrine of the Gospel, when the supernatural element in the teaching of Christ is no longer foremost in the words and the example of the apostolic follower of Christ. It is also the unhappy consequence of a loss of earnestness



in the struggle against self and in the quest for sanctity.

*"You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* Jesus is certainly not telling His disciples here to do good in order to be seen; He will later recommend that they try not to attract notice. But in this instruction He is noting the fact that edification should be the effect of the entire life of a man, especially of His intimate follower. To what purpose has one received the light of faith, the grace of the sacraments, the grace of a religious vocation, if by one's life one contradicts that which these high privileges imply? Much is expected of a religious; if by word or deed he shows himself false to the promises he made to God, scandal is given. Our lives are meant to glorify the Savior, to be a living exemplification of our faith. Then, seeing our good works, men will give glory to God and will feel themselves moved to imitate our good example. Our actions will have proved that the teachings of the Gospel are not impossible to observe and our happiness will show that the pursuit of holiness is far from being a source of gloom or sadness. We have been put on a lampstand to give light to all who are in the house of the human family, a divine light and also a divine warmth, which we ourselves must draw from the hearth fire that is Jesus.

"O God, unchangeable power and light eternal, mercifully regard the wonderful mystery of Thy whole Church, and peacefully effect by Thy eternal decree the salvation of mankind, that all the world may experience and see that which was fallen raised up, that which was old made new, and all things restored through Him from whom they received their beginning, even our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son" (Roman Missal).

*Abuse of the Tongue*



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“And if anyone thinks himself to be religious, not restraining his tongue but deceiving his own heart, that man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26).

St. James includes the governing of the tongue among the good works required for justification and eternal salvation.

Most Holy Trinity, grant that my observance of silence may lead me to a closer union with You, dwelling within me.

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What is the ordinary source of our faults? Is it not abuse of the tongue, that *very world of iniquity*, as St. James terms it, whence proceed pride, flattery, deceit, false judgments, harmful gossip—in a word, almost all the sins that one can commit? The tongue can serve as the able interpreter, so to speak, of all human passions. If a religious who does not hesitate to speak at forbidden times would make her evening examination of conscience sincerely, she would probably discover that even if she has not committed faults against fraternal charity, she has, at all events, sinned in various ways against the virtue of prudence. Even if her conversations held in times of silence were themselves free from fault—unlikely as this is—it is certain that time spent in idle talking is lost to whatever duty obedience has assigned; and, in any case, such infractions of rule are always displeasing to our Lord, even when they do not offend Him formally. If we are to render an account to our Judge for

every idle word, what will be the accounting demanded for conversations that are opposed to His good pleasure and even to His holy will?

Again, we are obliged by our religious profession to seek perfection and, therefore, to practice virtue and so to make ourselves worthy of the divine favor. Herein lies one of the chief advantages of the practice of silence, for it induces and preserves interior calm, tranquillity of soul, and the recollection so necessary for prayer. In observing silence we practice humility, mortification, patience, obedience, self-renunciation, and conformity to the divine will. What a difference there is between the religious who carefully observes silence and one who does not scruple to violate this rule at any time! The former advances toward perfection, for she is able to control her passions and so vanquish the enemies of her salvation; the latter lives in continual distraction and, perhaps, finds only boredom in her exercises of piety. She falls back instead of progressing in the way of perfection. One spiritual writer cited by Bossuet goes so far as to say that habitual infraction of silence could lead a soul by degrees to reprobation, while fidelity to it in a Christian spirit is sufficient to assure salvation.

Finally, is it not through the observance of silence that we can best prepare ourselves for the duties of our apostolate? Moses prepared for his high mission in the Madian desert where he contemplated the future sufferings of Christ. As a child St. John the Baptist went into solitude and remained there until the appointed day of his manifestation to Israel. And let us remember above all the long silence of Jesus in Nazareth and also the prayerful silence of the Apostles in the Cenacle as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion is inescapable that without the practice of

silence according to the Rule we cannot become worthy of the vocation to which we have been called.

O Jesus, I adore Your mysterious silence in the hidden life. Make me also silent among men that I may converse more intimately and even uninterruptedly with You. Through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, I implore You to teach me how to keep silence and how to speak. Manifest to me, good Jesus, more and more Your adorable perfection and lead me by the practice of recollected silence to perfect self-contempt and perfect union with You.

MARCH 6

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### *Religious Silence*



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“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19). This recommendation of the Apostle St. James is one of the various practical exhortations on the Christian life contained in his Epistle.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, help me to grow in the spirit of silence and recollection.

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St. James exhorts us to avoid intemperance of the tongue by a wise and circumspect slowness to speak. Nothing is more common among us than the readiness to express our ideas as soon as we have conceived them; yet nothing is more opposed to the spirit of the *Gospel*. In the judgment again of St. James, *if anyone thinks himself to be religious, not restraining his tongue . . . that man's religion is vain*. It is to curb this universal and disorderly tendency toward

immoderation in talking that all founders of religious orders have prescribed certain periods of silence during which any unnecessary conversation is formally prohibited. What more effective measure against idle words could there be than these hours of recollection when we are permitted to speak only with God dwelling within us!

In the language of early monasticism, silence is the "soul of peace" and the "union of hearts," the "pillar which supports the edifice," the essential means, in short of preserving order and discipline. Where each member of a religious community is pledged to do her share in maintaining regularity, itself one of the greatest boons of community life, any who take liberties opposed to this good order destroy insofar as they can the beautiful harmony that is so pleasing to God and to men who are according to God's own heart. The disturbance of harmony is precisely the evil result that is inevitably produced by infractions of the rule on silence, since we cannot violate this rule without involving at the same time another person. When the Rule enjoins silence, any violation harms both the offender and her neighbor. No one has the right to take from another soul unnecessarily even a moment of recollection. And if the bad example influences several others, the entire house gradually loses the spirit of quietness and peace. Other evils, too, quickly appear, such as complaints and murmuring, calumny and dissension.

If, on the other hand, silence is carefully observed and all the members of a religious household pass in holy recollection from one duty to another, is it not evident that harmony, regularity, and a union of hearts will prevail therein? Furthermore, our own experience will tell us that if we allow ourselves relaxation in the matter of silence, fervor cools and undue distraction and levity enter into even our spiritual

exercises. In short, without the practice of silence, both interior and exterior, there is no spiritual advancement. Let us resolve, then, to be careful not to speak when the Rule forbids it; otherwise, in addition to thwarting the designs of Providence for the Congregation and for each of us individually, we shall weaken discipline, disfigure the beauty of our religious institute, and expose ourselves to the many evils that result from an intemperate use of the tongue.

O my God, let not Your merciful designs for my spiritual progress or that of my community be impeded by my careless violations of the Rule on silence. Help me to keep my resolution of speaking only when the Rule allows, so that I may both grow in Your divine friendship and expiate my past intemperance in the use of my tongue.

MARCH 7

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*The Third Dolor of Our Lady*



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“Behold, thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing”  
(Lk. 2:48).

The deprivation for three days of the presence of Jesus was one of the greatest and most painful of our Lady’s sorrows for Jesus seemed to have voluntarily dissociated Himself from the two persons who loved Him most.

O Mother of fair love, teach me how to love.

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Mary realized that there were claims upon her Son far more exalted and demanding than hers and Joseph’s and that He who was her Child was also her God. But Mary

was only gradually learning the full meaning and extent of the mysterious demands of her great role as Mother of the Savior. Her loving complaint, "*Son, why hast thou done so to us?*" was the cry of a bewildered heart. Jesus had never before behaved so to her. It must have seemed to Mary, although she was absolutely sinless, that she had in some way proved unworthy of her mission and so was being rejected by her Son. The immeasurable agony of this feeling must have been for Mary as a foretaste of the desolation which her Son was to know in His last hour, on the cross.

The first two sorrows had been as a preparation for the third, which began the severing of the earthly and visible ties that united Jesus and Mary. But Mary, having entered into the mystery of this third dolor, also willed it. She willed it in the same spirit of submission with which Jesus accepted the chalice of His passion, which He prayed would pass from Him. In the illumination of her third sorrow, Mary saw clearly the special road she was to travel. It is one thing, however, to see the road and another to walk upon it; and so our Lady came to know only through experience the bitterness of the grief caused by bodily separation from her Son. It was through the desolation and abandonment that were part of the work of redemption that she was to accomplish more fully her mission as Co-Redemptrix. Jesus also, Son of God though He was, *learned obedience from the things that he suffered*, St. Paul tells us.

As the second dolor of Mary taught us the lesson of detachment from places and things, so now we are brought to think of our attitude toward persons, which can be as selfish and possessive as our love for material objects. Let us ask our Lady to give us a share in her wisdom. She will make us understand that we shall never love all men

as she does who is the Mother of us all, unless we love God more than all other beings; that is to say, unless we love His will more than the claims of any creature. Then, as Mary and Joseph's sorrowful three days were followed by the joyful reunion and the happy years at Nazareth, so, when we have learned our lesson in how to love, we too shall be given the full measure of union and companionship with Jesus. If our Lord withdraws His felt presence from the soul that loves Him, He does not thereby leave the heart. Often He conceals Himself from the soul that it may seek Him with more ardent desire and greater love. But whoever wishes to find Jesus must seek Him, like Joseph and Mary, *sorrowing*, that is, in the cross and mortification; for their search was not in vain. After they had sought Him *sorrowing* they found Him and *he went down with them and came to Nazareth*.

I grieve with you, O Mary, most sorrowful Mother, in the anguish you suffered during the three days' loss of Jesus; yet He who *feedeth among the lilies* had never left your immaculate heart. Your thoughts and affections, so humble, pure, and holy, were as lilies among which your Beloved delighted to dwell. Mother most amiable, I know that Jesus is found by those who seek Him. Teach me how to seek Him as I ought; that is, teach me to seek Him through you.



## *The Life of Faith*



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“He who is just lives by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

These words constitute one of the key themes of St. Paul’s  
...Epistle to the Romans.

Lord Jesus, increase in me the spirit of faith.

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In what does the life of faith consist? There are within us two motivating principles, either of which may determine our conduct. One is the human spirit, which rules the children of this world, or, in St. Paul’s phrase, *the sensual man*; the other is the spirit of God, which rules the just, or the sons of God. This spirit is based on faith: *He who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder to those who seek him*. Faith sustains the just man in all his acts, as their cause and motivation; and the soul is capable of receiving greater supernatural life according as it increases in faith. A religious entirely ruled by the spirit of faith is, by reason of this faith, on fire with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. She would even be willing to become a victim for her brethren in the spirit of St. Paul, who said, “*But even if I am made the libation for the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you.*”

More strictly considered, the spirit of faith means that we form our judgments according to the principles of the Gospel and direct all our actions by these principles. It is not a question only of theological or speculative faith by which we give a firm assent to all the Church believes and teaches,

but our convictions must reach the heart; *for with the heart a man believes unto justice*. When we have faith like this, we are wholly penetrated by the great truths of our religion; one truth only of which, perfectly grasped, would preserve us from ever committing deliberate sin. Such faith makes us consent with heart and mind and will to those teachings of Jesus that are most opposed to our natural tendencies; for example, that we must renounce self, be stripped of our own will, suffer affronts and humiliations patiently, and receive with resignation afflictions of all kinds. Whoever lives this life of faith believes and practices the "hard sayings" of Jesus as unreservedly and zealously as he believes in the divinity of Him who uttered them.

This spirit of faith must not only guide the intellect and reign over the heart; it must also establish its power over the will so as to govern all our actions. It should give efficacy to our prayer: *But if any of you is wanting in wisdom, let him ask it of God . . . and it will be given to him. But let him ask with faith, without hesitation*. It should be our strength in trials and contradictions, that *through the patience and the consolation afforded by the Scriptures we may have hope*. In short, faith should consecrate and sanctify every detail of our lives: *Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*. The spirit of faith gives one all power over the heart of God and of men. Have this spirit of faith and you will triumph over all the obstacles to your salvation. You will be raised to the perfection to which you have been called, even to the rich crown reserved for final perseverance.

O God, grant me that living confidence in prayer, that firmness in trial, that purity of intention and habit of recollection which characterizes the life of faith. When I think of the

past I become painfully aware that in the matter of practical faith I have an inexhaustible subject for humiliation and regret. Enable me at last to say truly with Your Apostle St. James, *I from my works will show thee my faith.*

MARCH 9

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### *Faith and Works*



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“I from my works will show thee my faith” (James 2:18).

These words of St. James recall to our minds the admonition of his divine Master: *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*

The perfect Christian follows Christ in the external practice of good works and also by growing in interior holiness and purity.

O Jesus, help me to live continually in Your holy presence and to act only for Your greater glory.

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When our faith manifests itself in both our thoughts and our conduct to the point of full practical acceptance of the teachings of the Gospel, then we possess perfect faith. But the identification with Jesus in thoughts, desires, words, and actions, which perfect faith implies, presupposes that certain principles are already active in our daily lives. The first and primary necessity is that of purifying the heart. Faith lives in direct proportion to purity of heart; for there exists between the mind and the heart such a close relation of light and illusion, of good and evil, that one who becomes the servant of his passions is no longer moved by the truths of

faith. He may still accept them, but they now seem to him dreamlike and unreal.

The connection between purity of heart and illumination of the mind is repeatedly suggested in Scripture. "*Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God,*" are the words of our Savior Himself; and David wrote, *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.* The light of faith, if we keep our hearts free from sin, goes on increasing until we can say with the Apostle of the Gentiles, *But we all, with faces unveiled, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord.*

Another aid toward the life of faith is meditation on the truths of faith. This holy exercise causes us to relish these truths, it stamps them upon our hearts, it makes them pass, as it were, into the very substance of our souls. A third means is fervent and frequent prayer. We should often think of our Savior's words to the man in the Gospel who asked the cure of his son: "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes*"; and we should say to our Lord with this anxious father, "*I do believe; help my unbelief.*" With what fervor we should repeat this prayer if we were really convinced that, besides the consideration of our own spiritual progress, the salvation of the souls entrusted to us might depend upon the degree to which we live the life of faith!

O my God, enable me to live habitually in Your presence and to meditate profitably upon the truths most useful to my soul. Inspire me to have recourse to You in prayer whenever I am in doubt or anxiety of mind. Rid me of all mean and selfish views and let not impatience, aversion, or vanity spoil

my works. Grant me, in Your goodness and mercy, a living active faith that will sanctify all my actions, especially in my relations with others.

MARCH 10

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### *The Anointing at Bethany*



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“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of precious ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table” (Mt. 26:6, 7).

Six days before the Pasch, Jesus, before entering the Holy City, stopped at Bethany where He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and attended a feast in His honor at the house of Simon the leper.

O Jesus, grant that my own anxieties and suffering may never cause me to fail in charity toward others.

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In the course of this repast at the house of Simon, at which Martha served and the risen Lazarus was among the guests, Mary, the sister of Martha, entered the hall, carrying an alabaster jar of perfume. Breaking the wax seal, she poured the contents of the jar upon our Savior’s head and then on His feet. Finally, she bent down over the sacred feet and wiped them with her hair, a supreme gesture of homage. Her action did not arouse great surprise, for the anointing of the head was an ordinary courtesy to a distinguished guest. The anointing of the feet, also, would not seem too great an honor for One who had raised Lazarus from the

dead. But what must have caused astonishment was that all the precious perfume was poured out at once, since the jar contained enough for several anointings. And when the sweet fragrance of the spikenard had pervaded the house, everyone present appreciated the value of Mary's sacrifice; they knew the high cost of pure liquid nard.

But this generosity of Mary's found its critics, and in a quarter where it should least have encountered them, namely, among our Savior's own disciples. "*Why,*" said Judas, "*was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?*" Jesus came immediately to Mary's defense: "*Let her be. Why do you trouble her? She has done me a good turn. For the poor you have always with you, and whenever you want you can do good to them; but you do not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body in preparation for burial.*" As for Mary, could she have known in advance the mystery contained in her anointing of Jesus? Perhaps it was an interior knowledge that prompted her generous act. In any case, her loving heart obeyed a prophetic inspiration. Because of the great importance which was attached in antiquity to decent burial and the proper anointing of the body, this anticipated anointing of our Savior has profound significance. On the night of Jesus' death, time would not permit that His body should be so tenderly cared for. Mary's recompense for her loving and generous act was immediately revealed by our Savior Himself. The memory of her good work would be forever perpetuated in the Church. And so it has happened. Down the ages the Church has been filled with the fragrance of Mary's ointment.

Divine Savior, what a sad and mysterious contrast is presented to us in this mystery! You were criticized by an Apostle and

served and consoled by one of the simple faithful. Judas had lost his faith. Oh, never allow me to be false to my vocation and its special graces. And help me also, good Jesus, to imitate Your calm and moderation in Your defense of Mary and Your mildness in reproving Judas. Your cross and tomb were vividly before Your mind at the supper in Simon's house, yet with what sweetness and generosity You continued to instruct and admonish!

MARCH 11

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*This "Little While"*



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"A little while and you shall see me no longer; and again a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father" (Jn. 16:16).

In spirit join the Apostles as they listen to the words of Jesus in His last discourse before His passion and death.

Divine Savior, teach me to appreciate the great privilege that is mine of serving You in the darkness of faith.

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The utterances of the Incarnate Son of God are, as He tells us Himself, *spirit and life*. Very often they are also full of mystery and to be understood only through the light gained in prayer. The text proposed for our meditation today is among these especially mysterious utterances, mysterious to the disciples as well, for they said, "*What is this 'little while' of which he speaks? We do not know what he is saying.*" It would seem that our Savior referred in His first use of the phrase, *a little while*, to the interval that would elapse between His speaking these words and His reappear-

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ance after the Resurrection. St. Augustine, however, sees in our Savior's words a reference to the whole age of the world between His ascension and His second coming at the last judgment. Compared with eternity, all of time is indeed *a little while*, although to us it may seem very long. The *little while* has become nearly twenty centuries and still we do not see Him, but we know that He is with us in His Mystical Body, the Church. By His power the Church speaks and acts. Through her sacraments, instituted by Him, the life of Jesus flows into us for our sanctification. But when, at last, we shall really see Him, how our hearts will rejoice! And this joy, as Jesus told His disciples, no one shall take away.

Meanwhile, the disciples and all Christians after them were to *weep and lament*, while the world rejoiced; for the happiness of the world, which is achieved at the cost of so much effort and so briefly, does not consist in union with Jesus. The true and perfect Christian, however, passes through this life as a stranger and a pilgrim, always seeking and desiring his true country and its King, who is his sole and perfect joy. Our Lady said to St. Bernadette, "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next." This Jesus also says to His own. Not that the life of a Christian is a bitter thing; on the contrary, even here below it is a source of joy. Properly lived, however, it is a struggle and sometimes a severe one, which the divine will often complicates further by purifying trials.

The Apostles, too, had to struggle, to suffer, and to die. Jesus did not conceal from them their earthly destiny, but He promised that their sadness would be turned into joy and this prospect supported them in all their trials. How illogical, then, for a Christian to be cast down and dis-



couraged by difficulties and temptations! When sorrow and disappointment come, we should say to ourselves, "Here is the fulfillment of our Lord's words; and so, likewise, will His promise be fulfilled. I know that my sorrow will be changed into joy and that my happiness will be the greater as my sorrows borne in Jesus' name and for His sake will have been the more intense."

O Jesus, You are infallible Truth and You have promised that one day I shall see You face to face and know You as You are; no longer in the shadows of faith, but in the full splendor of eternal light. Help me to pass the *little while* of this life, strong in faith, suffering and doing all for Your sake and in union with You. If, sometimes, like the Apostles, I fail to understand the words You speak to me through my Superiors or through my trials and temptations, let the words of Your Apostle St. Peter bring me light and encouragement: *In him, though you do not see him, yet believing, you exult with a joy unspeakable and triumphant; receiving, as the final issue of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

MARCH 12

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### *The Reward of Suffering*



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"For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure" (2 Cor. 4:17).

St. Paul here reminds the Corinthians of the great recompense they are to receive, in order to strengthen their courage in bearing the trials of this life.

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O Jesus, grant me the grace of bearing my trials in the spirit of faith.

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We cannot reach heaven by any other road than that followed by Jesus our Model. He said to the disciples of Emmaus after His resurrection, "*Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?*" Again, to the sons of Zebedee who asked for a place of honor in His kingdom He replied, "*Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink?*" These utterances of our Savior contain the secret of the love the saints have for suffering. They wish to become like Jesus by imitating Him in His life of privation, labor, and pain. Moreover, by the patient endurance of suffering, we can expiate our sins. What more fitting reparation is there for sensuality than sickness and infirmity? How could we more effectively counteract our pride and vanity than by accepting without complaint humiliations, contempt, insult, and calumny? How might we better atone for inordinate ambition than by the practice of self-abnegation and poverty, even to the point of depriving ourselves of ordinary and permitted comforts and conveniences?

Again, suffering borne in a Christian spirit of faith and meekness contributes to the salvation of souls not only under the aspect of penance done for our sins and those of others, but as a means of edification. In order to be saved, the world must come to understand the meaning and necessity of self-renunciation and of carrying the cross after Jesus. These truths will be brought home to others only if we add our example to the instruction we give. This is why our divine Model voluntarily submitted to every form of suffering, why the Apostles rejoiced in their tribulations, and why so many of the saints speak of their happiness under affliction.

All the anxieties, humiliations, and annoyances that may be ours in life come from the hand of our Father, who knows what is best for us. He knows by what winding paths He will bring us to everlasting happiness, and what pattern of earthly existence will accord with the eternal destiny He wills for us. We must not fear, then, the pain, humiliation, temptation, and aridity that may come to us. Our Father is the husbandman who prunes the vine that it may bring forth more fruit. He wishes to enlarge our capacities, to make us aware of the depths of our weakness and helplessness, that we may really experience the truth of our Savior's warning: "*Without me you can do nothing.*" He would empty us of ourselves that He may fill us with His fullness and so bring us finally to that complete and endless union with Him which is the portion of the elect in heaven. Let us examine our attitude toward the cross in our lives and resolve to draw from our trials all the merits that Jesus wishes us to gain from them, as a means of advancing in His grace and in the life of union with Him.

O Jesus, forgive me for having profited so little in the past from the trials You have permitted me to undergo. Assist me by Your grace to suffer henceforth with resignation and even to rejoice in bearing all hardship for Your sake, my Savior, and in imitation of You.

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## *The Washing of the Disciples' Feet*




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“Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples and to dry them with the towel with which he was girded” (Jn. 13:5).

The washing of His Apostles' feet by our Savior was a most extraordinary act. This was a task ordinarily performed by non-Jews, by slaves for their masters, wives for their husbands, or children for their fathers.

O Jesus, help me to serve my neighbor in union with Your dispositions.

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In the course of the repast following the observance of the Paschal rite, Jesus rose from the table and girded Himself with a towel. Then, filling with water the basin placed at hand for the usual purifications, He began to wash the feet of His disciples and dry them with the towel. The customary ceremonial required the washing of the hands only, but Jesus added the washing of the feet. All were astounded at His action. Never had the Master shown them so great a mark of deference. St. John records every detail of this incident, as if he were still enthralled by the wonder with which he then viewed the Master serving His servants. We can well understand Peter's protest; this *really* was beneath the dignity of his Master and his God. But now was the hour of special tenderness. It was at the Last Supper also that Jesus addressed His disciples for the first and only time in the Gospel with the caressing and tender diminutive, “*My little children.*”

The great lesson which our Savior teaches us in washing the feet of His disciples is a double one of humility and charity, humility doing a service of charity. It is necessary to unite these two virtues. Humility without charity is still a shining virtue, but it is cold; and charity without humility is like burning straw. The lesson was very much needed, as we can see from the conduct of the Apostles who, even amid the grave circumstances and the solemnity of the Last Supper, still disputed over *which of them was reputed to be the greatest*. Jesus seems to have had it very much at heart to make His teaching on humility penetrate the souls of the Apostles.

Never had He demonstrated that virtue in a more striking and solemn manner than on this occasion, during the last hours of His life, as if it were to be His testament to them. St. John's text expressly affirms that it was in full consciousness of His divinity and of His excellence as the God-Man that He performed this action: *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from the supper and laid aside his garments, and taking a towel girded himself*. A little later, Jesus claimed for Himself the titles of *Master and Lord* with regard to the Apostles. He added that the servant was not greater than the master, nor the Apostles greater than He who sent them. Yet He abased Himself to perform for them, His Apostles and servants, in charity and humility, a service reserved for slaves. What, then, ought we not be ready to do when there is question of serving our fellow men? How dare we speak of our dignity!

O Jesus, help me to destroy once and for all the germs of ambition and egoism that I carry within me. You said to

Your Apostles after Your great act of humility and charity, "If you know these things, blessed shall you be if you do them." Grant me to merit that blessing which is to have part with You in eternity, where the last shall be first and the first last.

MARCH 14

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### *The Fourth Dolor of Our Lady*



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"And bearing the cross for himself, he went forth to the place called the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha" (Jn. 19:17).

The meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary was a further step in the external separation of the Mother and the Son, for there passed between them only a momentary glance of unutterable anguish.

Most sorrowful Mother Mary, help me to find holiness in bearing the cross.

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As Jesus was bearing His cross painfully through the streets of Jerusalem, He stopped to speak to some women who were weeping in love and grief for Him. His most afflicted Mother was also in the throng who were witnessing the first Way of the Cross and she too was weeping in unutterable sorrow; but for Mary Jesus had no word. Only their eyes met, briefly, in a private glance that only intensified their pain. Mary's heart was torn by two conflicting agonies; on the one hand, there was her longing to save Jesus from His intolerable suffering; on the other, was her knowledge that she must help Him finish His work, the work of our

redemption. Mary knew now the immensity of the task Jesus had taken upon Himself. She understood now the enormity of the world's sin and also the infinite value, as well as the bitterness, of the sorrow that was the price of its expiation. And she, the Virgin Mother, had to give Jesus to us on the cross as she had given Him to us in the stable. *"Daughters of Jerusalem,"* says the spouse in the Canticum of Canticles, *"come forth and look upon King Solomon in the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his marriage."* This coronation was a figure of Mary's offering of her divine Son to the Father in union with her own willed co-redemptive suffering.

We should reflect deeply upon the silent strength of our Lady in this dolor and upon her offering of herself in union with Christ's offering. Surely the loving union of her will with His must have been a comforting help to Jesus, while for her it could only have been agony. He had need of her silence and her strength then; and in this same sorrowful journey Jesus showed that He has need of us too. St. John Chrysostom asks why our Savior willed to endure His other sufferings alone, but in carrying the cross accepted the assistance of the Cyrenean. He replies that it was to make us understand that the cross of Christ is not sufficient without our cross. It may be that we are not often asked to bear very heavy crosses; the small ones that do come to us fill us, perhaps, with self-pity and the desire to be comforted by the sympathy of others. At such times, let us think of Mary in her fourth dolor and find in her example the strength to make our trials not occasions for self-pity, but for self-offering as a part of Christ's offering. Thus to share our small crosses with Jesus is to give them a new meaning and sublimity; just as Mary's task and her tears became

sublime because she suffered and wept not for herself, but for the sins of men and for the world's salvation.

O Mary most sorrowful, by that grief which you felt when you saw your beloved Son led to His death, obtain for me the grace to bear with patience and fortitude the crosses which God sends me. Then, O good Mother, I may hope to know something also of that other, later meeting between you and Jesus, when the night had passed and, in the dawn of the first Easter, you and Jesus shared the perfect joy of your love as you had shared your sorrow. O Mary, help me to love, serve, and follow your Son in company with you until death.

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MARCH 15

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*The Scandal of the Cross*



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“You will all be scandalized this night because of me” (Mt. 26:31).

Our Savior meant by these words that when the disciples would witness His humiliations and the sufferings of His passion, their faith would be severely tried and they would begin to doubt that He was the Messiah.

O Jesus, grant me the grace to bear humiliations meritoriously.

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On the way to the Garden of Gethsemani after the Last Supper, Jesus gave His final admonitions to His disciples and predicted that on that very night they would be scandalized in His regard. They would stumble, that is, on the path of fidelity to Him and scatter like frightened sheep. This abandonment and flight of Christ's little flock had been



foretold by the prophet Zacharias and Jesus now repeated his prophecy: "*for it is written, 'I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*" On more than one occasion Jesus had expressed His concern that His sufferings might not be an object of scandal to His own. He knew how incredible it would seem to them that the Envoy of God, the Messiah, should be delivered to the Gentiles, spit upon, scourged, and finally crucified. And so, again and again, He prepared His flock for this terrible eventuality by allusion, direct prophecy, and admonition. But His words were always, for them, hidden words; they did not understand. Nor do we ourselves comprehend any better the necessity for our own Calvaries, private or public. After His resurrection, Jesus will say to the disciples of Emmaus, "*Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?*" Sometimes God employs our whole life to produce in us the understanding of this sorrowful necessity; but achieve it we must if we are to be saved.

Knowing that He would descend into such depths of ignominy, Jesus wished His disciples not to forget who He was, whence He had come, and with whom He was to reign forever. He would become so repulsive to men's eyes that they would turn away their faces from Him in revulsion and pity; but they should not forget that this Man of Sorrows, who had become *a worm and no man* was God Incarnate. "*I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father.*" These words Jesus had spoken in His discourse after the Last Supper and the disciples had replied, "*Behold, now thou speakest plainly, and utterest no parable. . . . For this reason we believe that thou camest forth from God.*" Jesus replied, "*Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming,*

and has already come for you to be scattered, each one to his own house, and to leave me alone." At the moment when His divinity was about to be utterly eclipsed, our Savior affirmed it directly. Before lowering His head to the sufferings of the passion, He raised it, so to speak, to show that it could wear a crown. Jesus desires that we, also, upon beholding Him in His profound abasement, should repeat often to ourselves, "Behold your King!"

Jesus, my Redeemer, it is frightening to human weakness to think that sometimes we shall have to suffer discredit and contempt even from our own in order to model our life and death more closely upon Yours. Make me less sensitive to wounds inflicted upon my self-love, and mercifully pardon my pride in the past. What claim to renown ever equaled Yours, who could say to Your enemies without fear of contradiction, "*Which of you can convict me of sin?*" Help me, O my Savior, to bear with resignation all dishonor that may come to me, whether through my fault or not.

MARCH 16

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### *The Agony of Our Savior*



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"Then Jesus came with them to a country place called Gethsemani, and he said to his disciples. 'Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray'" (Mt. 26:36).

The traditional site of the garden of the Agony is at the foot of Mount Olivet. From here Jesus would ascend into heaven to take His place on the throne of His glory; and in the nearby Valley of Josaphat, He will one day judge mankind.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of willing the trials You send me.

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According to His custom (well known to Judas) Jesus came with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemani, going thus of His own accord into the snare which He knew had been laid for Him. *"Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray,"* He said to the disciples. *And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be saddened and exceedingly troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is sad, even unto death. Wait here and watch with me."* The whole soul of Jesus was overwhelmed with anguish and dread. The immediate cause of His mortal sadness was the imminence of His passion and crucifixion. In imagination He viewed all the scenes of His passion in their finest details: the torments and shame, the malice of His enemies, and the unfaithfulness of His own. He was also conscious in their fullness of the ingratitude of men and the burden of sin which He had to expiate by His sacrifice.

It is in accordance with human nature to fear and abhor suffering and death, and at His Incarnation Jesus had assumed a real human nature. He had a human will as well as a divine will. His agony in Gethsemani, materially expressed by the bloody sweat, was the effect of the struggle between the instinctive and the deliberate movements of this human will. Instinctively, our Savior shrank from the ordeal of His passion and death considered in themselves. What depths of the human heart are not fear and dread able to reach! How penetrating, then, must have been the dark waters of affliction that Jesus allowed to enter even into His soul in the prevision of His sufferings! But the

deliberate will of the Savior was wholly turned to the Father and, in a meritorious act of obedience, He voluntarily submitted to the plan decreed by the Father for man's redemption. He knew that it was impossible to pay the debt of the human race except by the shedding of every drop of His blood; it could not be alleged that His sufferings were to be excessive or unjust; they were necessary.

Yet all was possible to the Father; He could will something else. *And going forward a little, he fell on the ground, and began to pray that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him; and he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me."* Three times the same petition! If the prayer of Jesus had been absolute, it would have been granted, but it was contingent upon the divine good pleasure: *"Yet, not what I will, but what thou willest."* It was God's will that He undergo His bitter passion and death. Since the Father did not wish to change His will, Jesus asked for strength to accomplish it. *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him.* The essential prayer is that which asks the strength to do the will of God; but we are inclined to prefer the prayer that God conform His will to ours and remove from us the chalice that is too bitter.

My divine Redeemer, I am ashamed and humbled as I contemplate You in agony for my sake. You so well deserve that I should serve You wholeheartedly and with disinterested zeal; yet how easily I grow tired in Your service. How I measure my efforts and count the cost! How quickly I judge that I have done enough and that the cost of fidelity to You is too great! You saw my indolence and lack of generosity and yet You shed Your blood for my salvation. Help me at last to make amends and to serve You from now on with

the faithfulness, love, and generosity to which You have full right.

MARCH 17

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### *The Angel of the Agony*



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“And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him” (Lk. 22:43).

Contemplate Jesus receiving the ministrations of the angel sent from heaven to strengthen Him.

O Jesus, help me to endure interior trials in such a manner as to deserve Your special assistance.

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The manner in which our Savior endured His agony is as astonishing to our human minds as the excessiveness of the agony itself. One writer on the Passion says of it: “That the God-Man allows every kind of insult and violence to come upon Him from without is something before unheard of; but, after all, it is the logical consequence of the bloody Redemption decreed by His Father and accepted by Him. That He lets loose the storm in His own soul, that He abandons His own sensibilities to natural weakness such as ours, that He allows Himself to fall below the ideal of calm, and, as it were, invincible strength after which we love to model our heroes; this is something more astonishing for our human feelings, something that scandalizes our pride. Nevertheless, it is so. O marvel of condescension, priceless lesson and consolation!” He, the Strong One, the Master, went to seek support from His Apostles. Perhaps His un-

speakable sadness would have been lacking in a choice and intimate pain, if He had not been obliged to ask for help from a source exterior to Himself. But He found the Apostles sleeping; and when He saw that human support was denied Him, He returned to knock again at the Heart of God by the word which had always been so efficacious. "*Father, if thou art willing.*" "Father!" What sweet humility in the word!

But the Father was silent. The time had passed when the voice from on high said, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" In this hour, the Son is, so to speak, no longer Son, but *for our sakes he made him to be sin who knew nothing of sin, so that in him we might become the justice of God.* An angel, however, was sent to Him. The Gospel tells us nothing of his identity. Was it Michael or Gabriel? Surely no less than the highest of the celestial spirits would be sent to assist the Son of God! And He who willed to make Himself *a little lower than the angels* now deigned to accept their ministrations. We do not know in what the "strengthening" consisted. Probably the angel showed our Savior, under sensible images, all the excellence and sublimity of His passion, all that would result from it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. What honor and happiness for us if the angel showed us to Him as among those who through gratitude and reverence for His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemani would wage a victorious combat with interior trials!

O Jesus, never let temptations to fear or dejection or weariness of mind make me less generous in Your service. In all interior anxiety and suffering, help me to find new strength in the remembrance of Your cruel trial and abandonment in the Garden of Gethsemani; for in You *we have not a high priest*

*who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tried as we are in all things except sin.*

MARCH 18

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## *The Kiss of Judas*



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“Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, ‘Sleep on now, and take your rest! Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand’” (Mt. 26:45, 46).

Represent to yourself Jesus going to meet His enemies and receiving the kiss of Judas.

O Jesus, preserve me from the least acts of hypocrisy in my service of You.

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Not only did Jesus accept the fortifying counsels of the angel with infinite condescension and humility, but He immediately acted upon them. For the third time He went to Peter, James, and John, and again He found them sleeping. “*Sleep on now, and take your rest,*” He said sadly. Then, with a decisiveness which contrasted sharply with the despondency and weakness He had shown in His agony, He aroused the sleeping Apostles, saying, “*Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand.*” The garden and the path which crossed it were suddenly invaded by armed men. Jesus did not will to be taken by surprise. In order to show that He would suffer and die

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freely, by the act of His own will, He went to meet His enemies. On their side, all was uncertainty, haste, and agitation. But the attitude of Jesus in their presence was one of confident strength and calm.

Judas left the band of soldiers and, approaching Jesus, he said, "*Rabbi!*" and kissed Him. We are astounded and horrified by this abominable act. Such base hypocrisy and treachery are scarcely credible. The ordinary sign of friendship and deference from a disciple to his master was perverted by Judas into a signal of betrayal, into a ruse, whereby Jesus would be delivered over to a most terrible martyrdom. He had not been moved by the warning of Jesus at the Last Supper, nor is he affected now by His powerful and loving glance, nor by the name of *friend*, nor by the kiss which our Savior does not refuse him. Such is the human heart when it has been abandoned by grace. How we should fear to abuse the gifts of God and how deep should be our distrust of ourselves!

Jesus accepted the kiss of Judas and said to him, as one more delicate appeal of His love, "*Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?*" Then, to show him that He had heard the conversation between Judas and the soldiers on the way to the garden, Jesus added, "*Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" Every crime was to be represented in the passion. When our Savior felt the kiss of Judas He recognized in it all the betrayals, secret and public, of those down the ages who would owe Him the most love and fidelity — His priests and religious. Judas was meant to be both. We should often kiss the feet of Jesus on our crucifix with love, in reparation for this base betrayal and for all those that have followed it, including our own lesser infidelities. Jesus also, hoped by His act of ineffable sweetness



and charity in accepting Judas' caress to touch his heart. Thus far is our Savior willing to go in His love for sinners and His longing for their conversion.

"O Fountain of everlasting love, what shall I say of You? . . . Beyond all hope have You shown mercy to Your servant; and beyond all desert have You manifested Your grace and friendship. What return shall I make to You? . . . Is it much that I should serve You, whom the whole creation is bound to serve? It ought not to seem much to me to serve You; but this rather appears great and wonderful to me, that You condescend to receive one so wretched and unworthy for Your servant" (*Imitation of Christ*).

MARCH 19

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*St. Joseph, Spouse of Our Lady, Patron of the  
Universal Church*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 801)

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MARCH 20

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*Jesus Bound*



"Now having seized him, they led him away" (Lk. 22:54). Contemplate Jesus allowing Himself to be deprived of His liberty. Divine Savior, grant that the bond between us may become a true and indissoluble union of hearts.

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In permitting His enemies to lay hold of Him, Jesus, strictly speaking, accomplished the sacrifice of His liberty, His honor, and His life. From then on He was the helpless Victim of the cruelty of His enemies; for in extending His hands and allowing them to be bound, He surrendered all power over Himself. When He would be struck He would be unable to wipe away the spittle. This sacrifice Jesus made voluntarily and with infinite patience, charity, and humility. He checked the disciples who wished to defend Him and cured the servant of the high priest whose ear Peter had cut off.

If, then, we see Jesus bound and in the power of His foes, it is not that their bonds prevent Him from escaping. It is the will of His Father which has, in reality, deprived Him of His liberty. The whole fatal progress of the passion tended toward the further restriction of our Savior's freedom. Each privation brought a new suffering, until the last step in the work of divine Justice succeeded in immobilizing Him in pain. On the cross the slightest movement only intensified His agony. The sick turn painfully in their beds; they need this movement which, at least, provides a change of suffering. They rest from one pain by enduring another, but on the cross there was no rest to hope for except in death; and death came slowly.

This aspect of our Savior's passion was necessary because man had sinned by abusing his liberty, and the chastisement should correspond to the fault. Jesus says to us, as it were, from the cross: "I suffer that nothing may be lacking to the satisfaction that is owing to the Father for your sins. By the pain of My hands nailed to the cross, I expiate all the sins of which your hands have been the instruments. By My pierced feet I atone for all the steps you take in

pursuit of your own will as opposed to Mine; and by the wound in My side, I make satisfaction for all the inordinate affections of your heart." Pointing to each of His wounds, our Savior cries out to us, "See how I have loved you, how I have suffered for you! Ungrateful hearts, how can I reach you and draw you to Myself, if My wounds and My flowing blood do not win your gratitude and love?"

O Jesus, bound for my sake and crucified for love of me, I unite with Yours the sacrifice of my liberty which I made in taking the vow of obedience. Let me never regret this sacrifice and never look back, but persevere as You persevered, although Your suffering became more and more intense. The chains that I wear for You, O Jesus, are most beautiful and precious. They represent neither servitude nor slavery, but a bond of love between two hearts. Grant me the grace of desiring to be bound and of being willing to appear so, for love of You.

MARCH 21

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### *The Fifth Dolor of Our Lady*



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"Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother"  
(Jn. 19:25).

In these words St. John summarizes Mary's martyrdom. The fifth dolor breaks the last of the natural, external links between the Virgin and her Son.

Dear Mother of Sorrows, teach me how to weep with you.

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Mary stood close to the cross, but in these last hours of the life of Jesus she was to remain more than ever separated

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from Him exteriorly. It was not Mary but the soldiers, the enemies of Jesus, who gave Him to drink, just as it was not Mary but the Cyrenean who had helped Him to carry His cross; and as it was not Mary's veil but Veronica's that had wiped away the blood from the Holy Face. It would seem that Mary had now given all, that there was not more to be stripped from her; but Jesus required one last sacrifice, the most difficult sacrifice of all. It was His will to die bereft of every earthly possession, even of His Mother. The words of Jesus from the cross: "*Woman, behold thy son,*" brought unspeakable happiness to St. John, but what was their import for the Virgin Mother? The Beloved Disciple of Jesus was, of course, beloved of Mary, but how these words must have pierced her heart!

Yet, at this final moment, when Mary was left without prop or help or comfort, when she had lost her Son even before He was dead, at this moment Mary's motherhood enlarged to a world-wide, universal vocation which was to last throughout all ages. Her sorrow would be turned into joy, because now she would be the mother of the whole Christ in becoming the mother of His Mystical Body, which is an extension, in a mystical sense, of the Incarnation. Mary was to find Jesus again in John, another Christ in the Christian, for John at this supreme moment represented each one of us. "Jesus did not say, 'Behold in the person of John another son different from me,'" comments Origen, "but simply, *thy son*, as if He meant, 'you have only one Son and I am He in this one. Through the mystery that I am going to accomplish John is incorporated with Me; he is in Me and I will live in him. . . . And all those who will have the same title as John become from this moment in Me and with Me your only Son.'"

There is an important lesson for us in this fifth dolor of our beloved Mother. When we seem to ourselves helpless and bereft, our prayer hopeless, our attempts to love God futile, it may be that at this very moment our prayer and our love are on the point of becoming most fruitful. As out of Mary's hour of desolation at the foot of the cross came her greatness and glory as Mother of all mankind, so out of our small sufferings can come a share in her sublime mission. When our hearts have been liberated from selfishness and egoism, we shall be able to care for the persons and things God gives us to cherish, as Mary cares for us. Let us beg of God, through our Lady's intercession, to accomplish His work in us despite our frailties and failures and, as in the vision of Ezechiel, to send His spirit into the *dry bones* that they may live.

O Mary most sorrowful, no sorrow could be more cruel than yours, because no Son could ever be dearer than yours. Your pain was the bitterest of all, because your love was most sweet. By the pain of your immeasurable grief, O Mother of Sorrows, I commend to your special protection all who are afflicted in soul or body everywhere in the world. May your intercession obtain for them the grace to turn all their sufferings to eternal profit. And, O Mary, I beg you to offer to your crucified Son all my own pains of mind or body, that my tiny crosses may become fruitful through being united with His tremendous cross and your own most bitter sorrow.

## *Peter's Denials*



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“But Peter was following him at a distance” (Mt. 26:58).

Peter and probably John followed Jesus to the house of Caiphias, Divine Master, teach me a prudent distrust of myself.

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Peter seems to have repented of deserting His Master, and so he followed Him, but from afar, in company with *another disciple known to the high priest*, who seems to have been John. Observing that Peter remained outside the palace of Caiphias, the other disciple spoke for him to the portress, and he was permitted to enter. In this environment Peter was out of place. He was putting himself in the way of a fall, unfortified by prayer and unmindful of the fact that, only a short time since, he had been afraid like the others. Peter considered himself very strong. He did not suspect that sleeping in his heart beside his protests of love for the Master were words of horrible blasphemy and shameful denial. A coal fire had been lighted in the court and the servants and attendants were standing about it, warming themselves, for the night was cold. Peter joined them. One of the maidservants, looking closely at him, said, “*Art thou also one of this man’s disciples?*” Peter answered, “*I am not.*”

Uneasy and alarmed, Peter made his way toward the gate, too agitated to notice the crowing of a cock. At the entrance another servant said, “*This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth.*” This time Peter denied with an oath that he so much as knew Jesus. Perhaps his first lie had escaped him

because of his confusion and natural impulsiveness; but now the second followed. The die had been cast. Finally, after some time had elapsed, one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden said, "*Did I not see thee in the garden with him?*" "You are a Galilean, your accent betrays you," "Surely you are one of this man's followers," said others. And now Peter *began to curse and to swear that he did not know the man.*

In reality, it was himself whom Peter did not know. He was unaware of his own weakness. But who of us is not? It is because God knows this that He sends us certain trials and permits certain falls. He intends that they should open our eyes to ourselves. Jesus had great things in mind for Peter and He wished Peter to love only Him and His Church. For this reason He permitted this deplorable fall, which would strip away the veil from the heart of Peter, take away all self-esteem, and disgust him forever with egoism and human respect. Thus, Peter would be able to say one day sincerely and three times, "*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Lord Jesus, if Peter had prayed in the garden instead of sleeping, he would not have trusted so unwisely in himself. If he had followed You closely instead of *at a distance*, he would not have fallen into the hands of Your enemies. But if I judge Peter's sin by my own conscience, the sentence I would pass upon him dies away on my lips. Such is my ignorance of myself that I not only make excuses in order to do wrong, but I excuse myself for the wrong I have done; and even after I recognize my fault I still defend myself. Lord, help me to know myself and to know You.

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*The Repentance of Peter*

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“And at that moment, while he was yet speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘Before a cock crows, thou wilt deny me thrice.’ And Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:61, 62).

At the moment when Peter denied his Master for the third time, Jesus, surrounded by soldiers and by the servants of the high priest, crossed the courtyard where Peter was standing. The grace of His merciful glance revealed to Peter the enormity of his sin and filled him with remorse.

Great St. Peter, obtain for me the grace of sincere contrition for my sins.

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The depth of Peter’s fall appears still greater when we think of the new sorrow and humiliation it caused our Savior. One Apostle had sold and betrayed Him, all had abandoned Him, and now the leader of the Twelve had denied with curses and oaths that he ever knew Him. Could desertion be more complete? Yet, the look that Jesus cast upon Peter was not a glance of anger or sternness. There was in it, no doubt, reproach and deep sorrow, but there was also infinite mercy and an appeal for trust. It was a life-giving glance, full of precious and powerful grace. It was the gaze of divine mercy, which in an instant can transform sinners into saints and make apostles of renegades and persecutors.

In the light of this glance of Jesus Peter saw the frightful



abyss into which he had fallen; but he saw at the same moment the Hand stretched out to him. And as before, on the Lake of Galilee, he grasped that Hand and it drew him out of the abyss. Then, together with the awakened consciousness of his fault, came remorse. He had denied the Master to whom so often he had protested his fidelity. He had offended Jesus who was his Friend, his God, and his All. *And Peter went out and wept bitterly.* He immediately left the place of his fall, he wept, and he would never cease weeping. The words of Jesus had failed to penetrate the heart of Judas, "*Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?*" "*Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" But one look from Him melted and nearly broke the heart of Peter.

Let us think of Peter fleeing into the night, not knowing where he was going, his eyes streaming with tears; and let us also contemplate the Savior, enduring meanwhile the mockery and the blows of His guards. "*I do not know this man you are talking about*" — these words occupy the thoughts of both Jesus and Peter. Peter will think of them all the rest of his life, and Jesus will remember them until His death. The lance of the centurion did not pierce only a dead heart; it had already been opened — by Peter, and especially by Judas.

O St. Peter, you never forgot the glance of Jesus that was so full of grace for you; nor did you ever forget your fault. Your love for Jesus was humble ever after, and so martyrdom found you faithful. Good St. Peter, pray for me, that the remembrance of my sins and of the many graces God has given me may keep me distrustful of myself and filled with confidence in Him.

## *The Scourging*



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“Pilate, then, took Jesus and had him scourged” (Jn. 19:1).

The scourging is one of the principal mysteries of the passion of our Savior. Ordinarily, He referred to it explicitly whenever He spoke of His passion.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of using the members and powers of my body only in Your service.

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Scourging was a frightful and most cruel punishment, first, because of the dishonor and shame it inflicted. It was a penalty reserved for men of low condition: criminals, slaves, and assassins. Whoever had only once passed under the whip was forever branded with this disgrace. There was also the further shame of being stripped of one's garments. The punishment of scourging might take place secretly or in public. In our Savior's case it would seem that this shameful indignity was inflicted publicly. The column of the flagellation was about half the height of a man. The victim bent over it and presented his back to those who wielded the whips. Not infrequently it happened that the condemned man succumbed during this torture. The instrument used was made of hardened leather thongs weighted at the ends with small leaden balls.

Isaias drew in prophecy a poignant and realistic picture of our Savior's bitter passion, the details of which seem to suit only too well the punishment of the scourging: *there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness; and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous*

*of him. Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity; and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted.* David also said in prophecy, *Upon my back the plowers plowed; long did they make their furrows.*

But the violence of the torture did not prevent our Savior from practicing the most sublime interior virtues. He suffered the flagellation with divine patience and with His heart raised to God. He endured it with unspeakable love for all men, including His executioners, Pilate, and the Jews. His intention in submitting to this dreadful torment is not difficult to conjecture. Scourging causes acute physical and sensible suffering; it is a pain of the sense of touch. Surely our Savior wished to make satisfaction by it for all sins of the flesh and to take upon Himself their chastisement. According to the Law, the penalty for such offenses was scourging. No one, therefore, who has fallen into this kind of sin need ever despair or lose courage; for in Jesus scourged at the pillar there is superabundant satisfaction, grace of conversion, and the most ardent love.

O Jesus, scourged at the pillar, if I could understand the terrible mystery of human depravity and its perversion of the flesh which was created to be the radiant covering of a pure soul, perhaps I could comprehend better the mystery of Your divine expiation. Yet, Sodom and Gomorrha, burning like sinister torches, and the deluge which covered the whole corrupted world are memorable instances of divine vengeance for the sins of the flesh. This same corruption exists in the world today. What would long since have been our fate, O Jesus, if the

streams of Your precious blood had not flowed for us with so much love in Your scourging? In return, let me at least sacrifice in Your service all my bodily powers, my health and strength, in union with the immolation of Your most pure, most holy, most beautiful body.

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*The Annunciation to Our Lady*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 805)

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MARCH 26

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*The Crowning With Thorns*



“And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed into his right hand” (Mt. 27:28, 29).

After the scourging the soldiers led Jesus into the court of the praetorium where He was to be kept under guard until the final verdict of condemnation. Through malice, or with the permission of Pilate — perhaps even at his instigation — they employed the time in outraging Jesus.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of meditating upon Your sufferings with deeper understanding and love.

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Jesus had made several affirmations in the course of His trial. Two were so clearly formulated as to leave no room

for doubt. To the high priest who challenged Him to declare that He was the Son of God, the expected Messiah, He had said, "I am." To Pilate who, visibly disturbed, had demanded, "Thou art then a king?" Jesus had replied, "Thou sayest it; I am a king." He was God and He was King; it was for these two truths that He would die. The sense of our Savior's double affirmation had been so well grasped that it was precisely this double character of God and King that was the object of all the derision and mockery throughout His passion. What could have suggested to the Roman soldiers the cruel irony of the scepter and mantle and the crowning of thorns, if it were not this double claim which was agitating all Israel?

In the course of the passion the divinity of our Savior was derided in two of its highest prerogatives: knowledge of the future and immunity from death. In the court of Caiphas they struck His face with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophesy to us, O Christ! who is it that struck thee?" As He hung upon the cross, the passers-by called up to Him, "If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross!" and the priests said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save!" The kingship of Jesus was held up to derision in the cry, "If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him"; again, in the inscription placed upon the cross and also in the mockery of the crowning with thorns.

Tearing the garment from our Savior's bleeding shoulders, His Roman guards threw a tattered mantle about Him. Then, thrusting a reed into His hands, they forced Him to sit upon His "throne," perhaps the stump of a pillar. The crown of thorns, fashioned, probably, not in the shape of a band, but forming a sort of cap, was pressed down into His head.

The intensity of this pain pervaded His whole body; it penetrated even to the soul. The least movement drove the thorns deeper into His head; *and they spat on him, and took the reed and kept striking him on the head.* What suffering and ignominy! Yet He who endured this inhuman torment was the living God, who even at that moment was extending His scepter over the bright array of the angelic hosts. He was the Messiah, the Expected One of His people. And our Savior, crowned with thorns, was also the Victim who expiated by His pain the sins of pride and ambition which afflict the children of Adam. He atoned thus for all the outrages that are committed in the name of glory and power, all injuries to the reputation and honor of others, all impatience in suffering mockery and derision, all revolts against legitimate authority, especially the authority of the Church.

I accuse the insolent soldiery of a most cruel and blasphemous treatment of You, my Jesus; but is it not myself rather that I should accuse? For the thorns which pierced Your adorable head were not as painful as my sins. The reed with which You were struck wounded Your heart less keenly than my inconstancy. The mockery of the scarlet cloak did not offend Your majesty as grievously as the disorders into which I have fallen because of my sins. Forgive me, O divine King, and make me worthy to receive one day from Your hands the crown, the scepter, and the mantle of glory reserved for the elect.

*The Sentence of Pilate*



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“Then he handed him over to them to be crucified” (Jn. 19:16).

Pilate’s reluctance to pronounce the death sentence upon Jesus ended when he heard the threat of the Jews, *“If thou release this man, thou art no friend of Caesar; for everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.”*

O Jesus, grant me the grace to endure with patience unjust treatment in this world, but let me receive a merciful judgment from You in eternity.

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There was never a more iniquitous judgment than the decree of Pilate condemning Jesus to death. Several times he had solemnly declared His innocence; still, in the end, he pronounced the death sentence. Pilate had resorted to several expedients and, finally, as a last palliative to his uneasy conscience, he had said, *“I am innocent of the blood of this just man.”* He thought so, perhaps, but until the end of time the words will be repeated, *passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus*. The verdict of Pilate was also a most infamous and degrading one, for the Romans reserved the cross for slaves and common malefactors. Among the Jews the bodies of criminals who had been put to death for some especially heinous offense were exposed on a gibbet as a salutary warning. And so, it was written in the Law: *He is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree*. This ignominious chastisement our Savior was to bear in all its horror.

Yet we may find in the sentence of Pilate the marks of divine Providence. Cruel and shameful as the punishment

was, it was more fitting for the Savior than any of the penalties customary among the Jews. On the cross and by the cross He could still accomplish His final decrees and make His final legacy; and He could there reveal His holiness in all its sublimity. On the cross Jesus could die with the majesty of the God-Man, who expires at the moment freely chosen by Him. The cross could become His altar, it would be a most fitting standard of His kingdom. No other kind of death would have taught better the lesson Jesus wished to teach in thus sacrificing His life. What more striking emblem of the justice of God in the punishment of sin could be placed before the eyes of a guilty world than Jesus crucified? For the horror of the punishment corresponds to the enormity of the offense.

Our Savior Himself undoubtedly felt most keenly the iniquity, the cruelty, and the shame of His sentence, since He more than anyone else comprehended His own infinite sanctity. Yet He submitted to Pilate's judgment without bitterness; more than this, He accepted it with the most tender love for God and for us all, including Pilate and the Jews who condemned Him. If He made any appeal, it was to invoke the mercy of His Father for all men, particularly in view of this unjust condemnation. Let us prostrate ourselves in spirit at the very place where for love of us Jesus submitted to so unjust and shameful a sentence. From the bottom of our hearts let us thank Him for voluntarily taking this cruel punishment upon Himself; for it is we upon whom the sentence should have been passed.

“We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, for by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.”



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*The Sixth Dolor of Our Lady*

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“O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow” (Lam. 1:12).

These words of the prophet Jeremias are applied by the Church to the Mother of Sorrows. On Calvary, especially when she held the dead body of her Son in her arms, Mary made the greatest act of faith that was ever elicited on earth. She never wavered in her belief that out of the complete immolation and ignominy of the passion and death of Jesus would come His most glorious triumph.

Mary, dearest Mother, by your heart transfixed with sorrow, obtain for me the virtue of fraternal charity.

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In her sixth dolor Mary could at last embrace her Son and in the embrace renew all the lovely memories of His childhood, but her pain became thereby only the sharper. Jesus had drunk alone and unaided the bitter chalice of His passion and death. Now He was beyond the reach of her consolation; and even though she held His sacred body in her arms with unspeakable reverence, she could not heal the wounds that covered it—*from the sole of the foot unto the top of the head . . . wounds and bruises and swelling sores.* First, she adored that sacred body which, although separated from His soul, remained immediately united to the very Person of the Word. She contemplated the cruel ravages of the Passion and with measureless sorrow reviewed its entire course by following upon the body of Jesus the dreadful traces it had left. Now she could see all and at close range, but

even this poor contact was to be hers for only a brief time.

What, we may reverently ask, was in the mind of the Mother of Sorrows at this moment? Doubtless her thoughts went back to the happy days in Bethlehem and Nazareth, when He lay in her arms as powerless as now, but then able to be comforted by her maternal care. She recalled, no doubt, the nobility and majesty of the sacred humanity of the Savior, the glorious hour of the Last Supper. And in Mary's heart? What should we find there but the sword of sorrow foretold by Simeon?

This was grief ineffable and it was also ineffable love—for Jesus and for us. Mary is our Mother, not our judge. She had given us her Son, the most beautiful and lovely of the children of men; we restored Him to her a corpse, covered with the wounds inflicted by our sins, by us to whom He had come to bring salvation and life. But Mary is our loving Mother; she desires only that the passion and death of Jesus may bear its fruit in our souls; that in His visible wounds, as St. Bernard says, we may see the invisible wound of His love. Surely we can never look upon the cross without seeing also the desolate figure of the divine Mother holding the dead body of Jesus and without thanking God for Mary, through whom our Enemy was vanquished. Our Lady at the foot of the cross with Jesus dead in her arms is pre-eminently the Comforter of the afflicted. From the foot of the cross where she suffered so much, inexhaustible blessings and consolations have flowed out upon the world.

O holy Mother, who could ever comprehend the extent and intensity of your compassion! You are truly the Queen of Martyrs and the Mother of Sorrows. Well may you exclaim in your anguish, "*All ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow*"! Grant, O my dear Mother,

that I may be always mindful of your sorrows; that I may weep with you and receive the fruit of the passion of Jesus, my Savior.

MARCH 29

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### *Simon of Cyrene*



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“And as they led him away, they laid hold of a certain Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and upon him they laid the cross to bear it after Jesus” (Lk. 23:26).

By right of military authority, the Roman centurion in charge of carrying out our Savior’s death sentence requisitioned the services of one, Simon, a peasant of Cyrene.

Divine Redeemer, grant me the grace to recognize and venerate Your holy cross in my daily trials.

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Seeing that Jesus was at the end of His strength, the centurion realized that it was urgent to give Him relief without delay. But to bear the cross of a condemned man was a great dishonor; the soldiers had not been hired for this and the crowd would have refused. *I looked about and there was none to help*, Isaias had prophesied of the passion; *I sought and there was none to give aid*. It was at this crucial moment that a Cyrenean peasant named Simon was encountered at the gate of the city, as he was coming from the fields. According to their right, the soldiers *forced* Simon — the word is used by both St. Matthew and St. Mark — to carry the cross behind our Lord. There was need of force because Simon was unwilling; he had his own work to do. Jesus saw and heard all; perhaps, He even had to watch the soldiers bargaining with Simon for his assistance. Then, they

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removed the cross from His shoulders and Jesus walked, probably in front of Simon.

In Simon's heart there was, doubtless, bitter resentment at first. It was a great shame to be obliged to carry the cross of such a criminal. But little by little his resentment was changed to compassion, induced, surely, by the example of patience and heavenly sweetness that he observed in the Man who walked before him. His new dispositions won for him, in turn, precious graces which led finally to faith and love. Simon of Cyrene has an assured place in the history of the passion. He is there by name, and the names of his two children are added—because he carried the cross of Jesus, even under constraint, for a very brief time. If our Savior gave such renown and the assurance of salvation to one who carried the cross perforce and with reluctance, what will He not do for those who embrace the daily cross that is offered them!

This Cyrenian of our Savior's time still exists—in us. Do we not often carry, or rather drag, under constraint, the cross that is given us by Jesus Christ? Perhaps, it is only by force of circumstances or the fear of a greater evil that we continue to bear it at all. Yet Jesus walks before us also and says to us, "*He who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.*" The cross, then, is necessary, especially the one that is repugnant to us and that humiliates us in the eyes of others. The cross of the martyrs is a privileged one, from which God in His goodness removes the shame. "O blessed cross," cried the ecstatic St. Andrew, "cherished cross, long-desired, and ever sought!" But God may give us the cross of Simon of Cyrene, the humiliating cross which we drag and of which we are tempted to complain.

Divine Savior, help me to recognize Your cross in my life and to see it especially in the trials I must bear almost alone. Make me understand that the cross I should cherish is the one I most dread, that the cross without humiliation is incomplete. And for Your own holy and saving cross, O Jesus, be adored, blessed, and thanked eternally!

MARCH 30

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### *The First Word of Jesus Crucified*



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“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”  
(Lk. 23:34).

The first word uttered aloud by Jesus on the cross was a prayer for the pardon of all who had been instrumental in causing His death. And like the seventh and last cry of Jesus crucified this first one begins with the word, *Father*.

Divine Savior, help me to learn from You how to forgive all injuries.

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The terrible crucifixion had been completed; the cross had been raised upright, and our Savior's whole body, suspended by the wounds in His hands and feet, was suffering the most excruciating torment. All about Him was disorder, confusion, cries of blasphemy and hatred. But then it was that He uttered His first cry from the cross: “*Father, forgive them.*” It was an act of humility as well as a prayer; for could not the Son Himself, in all truth, have granted this pardon? It was also an expression of divine sweetness, which excuses and mitigates, and looks for something to justify pardon:

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*"they do not know what they are doing."* How would they, these executioners, who were habituated to their cruel employment? It was not their first crucifixion, nor would it be their last. As for the others who were responsible for the death of our Savior, St. Paul says of them, *had they known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.* But the ignorance of the Jews was certainly culpable ignorance, as our Savior Himself declared: *"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin."* The efficacy of this divine prayer for pardon was soon revealed in the conversion of the centurion and his men, who were the first to exclaim after the death of Jesus, *"Truly he was the Son of God."* It was to bear additional fruit in the Jews that were converted on the first Pentecost and afterward, and in the others who were to be converted until the end of time.

Pardon! Few words are more consoling to the human heart, but few actions are as difficult for us to perform. In the eyes of the world, one who pardons easily is thought of as lacking in firmness of character. The commanding of fear and respect by means of relentless vengeance was a formula of pagan power: "Let them hate, provided they fear." Jesus knew this well, and for this reason His first word on the cross was a prayer for pardon. We find it difficult to pardon easily, because we do not seek to motivate our forgiveness of others. It is necessary to look for the extenuating circumstance and to believe that it is there. Jesus discovered it even in those who crucified Him. It is the divine work of fraternal charity to remember that man is better than he sometimes appears; there are few souls who do not have good hidden within them. It is to these hidden depths that charity must descend.

But in order to accomplish this difficult work it is also

necessary for us first to look up, as Jesus did, and say *Father*. Then we shall be able to lower our gaze and say, "my brother." Then we shall see the obstacles to union dwindle and what appeared to us as mountains will gradually be leveled with the plain. Who, as he nears the end of life, does not perceive that he has exaggerated his antipathies as well as his loves? It is through meditation on this first word of Jesus on the cross that the saints have felt their souls melt with indulgence for others. By imitation of the divine prerogative of the forgiveness of injuries is the creature especially conformed to the image of his Creator. And only they are saved in whom are found a resemblance to Jesus Christ.

O Jesus, at the moment when Your life was ebbing away, when You felt everything giving way around You, Your goodness shone forth as a ray of the sun upon ruins, and its first ray was unreserved pardon. How consoling it is for us to look up to Your cross and see the radiance of Your indulgent goodness forming the last expression on Your divine face! Happy shall I be, if I can truly say in my turn, "As I have pardoned others, O my God, deign Thou to pardon me."

MARCH 31

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### *The Conversion of the Good Thief*



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"And Jesus said to him, 'Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise'" (Lk. 23:43).

Jesus silently permitted the insults and mockery of the crowd as He hung upon the cross; but to the poor thief hanging beside

Him, who spoke once in His defense, He immediately opened the kingdom of heaven.  
Divine Savior, perfect in me the virtue of hope.

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The episode of the good thief is one of the most wonderful and, for us, one of the most consoling events of the passion. The astonishing feature in it is the rapidity with which it takes place. Some words are exchanged, a brief dialogue between the two thieves, whose interchanges cross each other before the figure of the divine Victim. Then there is a prayer to Jesus, His response; and all is over. But all is also changed. One of the thieves has become a saint, so purified and authentic a member of the elect that he merits *this day* to become the companion of Christ in paradise: "*Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" God does not need a long time to enter into a soul and transform it completely once the soul has surrendered to Him.

The good thief heard all the blasphemies which were being hurled up toward the cross. But he had also listened to the sweet prayer in the first words that Jesus spoke on the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" He had observed the silence of Christ, as He was being hailed in derision as *Messias, King of the Jews, Son of God*. He appears to have sensed the monstrous injustice which had nailed to the cross the gentle, beneficent Christ in company with him and his companion, two admitted malefactors. An instinct of justice seems then to have convinced him that sooner or later God would avenge this fearful deed. "*Dost thou not even fear God,*" he cried to his companion, "*seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved; but this man has done nothing wrong.*"



And then, one would say, the light entered his soul and he acknowledged the divinity of Christ in asking for a remembrance in His kingdom. "O wondrous conversion!" exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "He sees one crucified and proclaims him the King of glory!" "He sees the gaping wounds and the flowing blood," says St. Ambrose, "and far from believing Him a criminal, he recognizes Him as God." After his prayer the thief was silent and Jesus said nothing more, but their eyes regarded each other and their two hearts spoke. "*In hoc enim totius forma salutis,*" says St. Ambrose of the good thief's conversion: "Here is the pattern of all salvation."

O Jesus, You show me in this incident the frightening power that You have given to men of either accepting or refusing Your favors. Your graces of repentance solicited the hearts of both thieves. One accepted them and passed from the cross to eternal happiness; the other resisted You. To think of yielding to despair in the very presence of the Mother of Sorrows, by whose intercession, surely, the good thief was saved! Divine Savior, grant me to remember in all temptations against the virtue of hope and to help others to remember the power of Your cross and Your infinite compassion.

APRIL 1

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### *The Thirst of Jesus Crucified*



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"Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst'" (Jn. 19:28).

Thirst is perhaps one of the most agonizing torments of death by crucifixion. A raging fever is produced by the inflammation of

the open wounds and the prolonged tension of nerves and muscles.

O Jesus, fill me with the desire of winning souls for You.

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The intensity of the agony of thirst suffered by Jesus on the cross can be judged from the fact that He spoke of it. As cruel as His other sufferings were, He did not complain. He did not speak of the thorns, nor of the scourging, nor of the nails that pierced His hands and feet. But His thirst drew from our Savior a request for its relief. During the sufferings of the passion no cooling drink had moistened His lips. His blood had flowed in streams during the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion; His whole body burned with fever. Yet even now He uttered His complaint with great reserve. He did not make a direct request and it was late, very late, when He revealed His suffering. Moreover, His chief purpose in making it known was to show that He willed to experience this torment also, and that not a drop in the bitter chalice of the crucifixion had been refused by Him.

Jesus also intended to proclaim the literal fulfillment of David's prophecy: *My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaws; to the dust of death you have brought me down.* He wished to remind us, too, of another thirst that tormented Him, of which His physical thirst was only a faint image. He thirsted for the salvation and redemption of all men, all without exception. He saw before Him in spirit all the members of the human race and He burned with desire for their salvation. For, besides the glory of the Father, what other purpose had His suffering and His death except the redemption of men whom He loves so much?

Hearing our Savior's cry, one of the soldiers compassionately

dipped a stalk of hyssop into a vessel full of "vinegar," that is, "common wine," and raised it to His lips. This was the relief that men offered to Him who gives all things to them in abundance, who opens to them fountains of living water and who lavishes upon them the *good wine*. Nor does the deeper thirst of our Savior receive a more comforting relief, for only one of the thieves offered Him his soul. How many who pass before the cross of Jesus refuse to give Him their souls! O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, I grieve with you in the added suffering which this cry of Jesus brought to your heart. You would have given your life gladly to offer to Jesus a little water, but you were unable to give Him even this small relief. Help me, my good Mother, to offer to Jesus in union with You, for the consolation of His deeper thirst, my good will, my reparation, my heart and soul; and enable me to work with zeal and success for the salvation of others.

APRIL 2

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### *The Piercing of Our Savior's Side*



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"But one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water" (Jn. 19:34).

According to Jewish law, the condemned had to be taken down from the cross and buried before evening. At the Jews' request, therefore, Pilate sent soldiers to break the legs of the crucified in order to hasten their death. Jesus was already dead. Yet, probably to obey orders and make sure of His death, one of the soldiers plunged his lance into our Savior's side. Immediately, blood and water flowed out of the wound.

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Divine Redeemer, increase my devotion to Your Sacred Heart and most Precious Blood.

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In permitting His side to be pierced, Jesus wished to give us another and undeniable proof of the reality of His death. At the very least the wound made by the lance would have caused His death; and it is this fact, above all, that St. John wishes to attest. Our Savior was really dead, and His sacrifice was one in which the victim gives the last drop of his blood. The side of Jesus opened by the lance is the last of the sorrowful mysteries. This wound exposed to view, as it were, the Heart of Jesus, revealing it as the Seat of love, the Center and Source of the life, virtues, merits, and all the mysteries of the God-Man. The devotion to the Precious Blood and the devotion to the Sacred Heart have their origin in the mystery of the piercing of Jesus' side with the lance. All this is the luminous side of the mystery; but with what shadow and sadness the soldier's action must have enveloped the sorrowful Mother of our Savior and His little group of faithful friends who remained at the foot of the cross!

What shall we say of our Lady's alarm and grief when she saw the soldier approaching her Son? To her faith and love there was nothing on earth holier than the lifeless body of the Savior. The lance did not pierce the body of Jesus more deeply than it pierced the heart of Mary. With what reverence and bitter tears she must have received the blood and water that flowed down upon the rock of Calvary! We may imagine her contemplating the cruel wound and offering to the Sacred Heart Its first homage of love and reparation.

Jesus annulled with His precious blood the sentence which had condemned us as sinners. Our sins made Him die and

His death restored us to life. And the nearer His death approached the more tender His love for us became. He seems then truly to have breathed only love. He prayed, and it was a prayer of compassion, "*Father, forgive them.*" He promised, and it was a promise of pity, "*Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" He gave His final gift on earth, and it was a pledge of mercy, "*Behold thy mother.*" Let us go to Jesus on the cross with confidence, for we shall find there the way to His heart. The passage into this heart, on fire with the most ardent love, was opened by the lance which He permitted to pierce His side. "O blessed lance, which has been the source of such great good for us," exclaims Pope St. Innocent IV, "O sacred nails, which deserved to bear so venerable a weight, and to be drenched with the blood that has cleansed us from our sins."

O Jesus, love opened Your heart to me, love leads me to it, love will receive me there. You will not reject me, Lord, although I am all unworthy of Your mercy. It is with the liveliest confidence that I come to hide myself in Your open side. There I wish to live and die—that good and blessed death of those who die in the Lord.

APRIL 3

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### *The Compassion of Our Lady*



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"Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (Jn. 19:25).

Contemplate the Mother of Sorrows on Calvary.

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O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, grant me some share in the feelings you experienced during the passion of your Son.

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With unutterable sorrow, Mary followed Jesus, at least in spirit through every step of His bitter passion. It is probable that she was in the Cenacle during the agony in the garden; but she undoubtedly witnessed in spirit all that took place in the Grotto of the Agony, and obtained from the Eternal Father the privilege of sharing in some degree the sufferings of her Son. Through Peter and, especially, through John, Mary was probably kept fully informed of events: the arrest of Jesus toward midnight, the flight of the disciples, the trial before Annas and Caiphas, the mockery and the scourging. This last suffering she may even have witnessed. At all events, we are certain that the whole frightful spectacle of Calvary was unfolded before Mary's eyes. She saw the nails and the wounds, she heard the blasphemies and cruel jests, and the words and groans of her Son.

After the cross was raised Mary stood beside it, her eyes fixed upon her dying Son. With what deep sorrow she must have gazed upon the thorns crowning His head and the nails piercing the sacred hands and feet! Mary witnessed also the casting of lots for His garments. They were now most holy relics, sanctified by their contact with the sacred humanity of Jesus and with His precious blood. How Mary must have burned with the desire of acquiring this treasure and preserving it for the Church! Then, after the death of Jesus, she beheld the Sacred Heart pierced with a lance and the blood and water flowing out. Her arms received the sacred body when it had been taken down from the cross and she assisted at the burial.

It is impossible even to imagine the greatness and depth

of Mary's sorrow during these hours; yet she bore all her suffering freely and voluntarily. That which brought our Lady to the foot of the cross and kept her there was, first of all, her faith, which revealed to her the full meaning of the death of Jesus. She knew that it was the sacrifice offered for our redemption. And as Eve had co-operated in the fall, it was right that the new Eve should take an effective part in the restoration of mankind. But it was Mary's love also which exacted from her the cruel sacrifice of being present at the death of Jesus. How could the Mother of Jesus endure suffering as great as this? Because her love was stronger than death and because, as His Mother, she desired to share the pain and ignominy of her Son. It is not in vain that you have been given the name of "Children of Our Lady of Sorrows." Consider this day the sufferings of Mary during the passion of her divine Son. Gather with her the fruits of the Cross that you may enjoy in eternity the fruits of the Tree of life.

O thou Mother, fount of love!  
Touch my spirit from above  
Make my heart with thine accord.

Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
Make my soul to glow and melt  
With the love of Christ our Lord.

Let me share with thee His pain,  
Who for all my sins was slain,  
Who for me in torments died.

Let me mingle tears with thee,  
Mourning Him who mourned for me,  
All the days that I may live.

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*The Seventh Dolor of Our Lady*

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“To what shall I compare thee? Or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction” (Lam. 2:13).

After the burial of Jesus, Mary, more desolate even than the Jerusalem of the prophet's lamentation, felt in all its weight the suffering Jesus had laid upon her in making her our Mother. O compassionate Virgin Mother, reveal to me the depths of the mystery of your Son's bitter passion and your own overwhelming grief.

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Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus from Mary's arms and prepared it for burial, wrapping it in strips of cloth sprinkled with the spices Nicodemus had brought and then enveloping it in a shroud of fine linen. A napkin was laid over the sacred head and face. Perhaps the placing of this last was reserved for Mary herself. With what deep sorrow she must have gazed for the last time on the features of her Son! And when His face was hidden under the veil, it must have seemed to her as if the light of her own life had been extinguished, that henceforth there would be only shadows around her. Then Jesus was laid in the tomb that had been furnished by Joseph of Arimathea, his own sepulcher which he gave to his Lord and Master. As the newborn Jesus was laid in a cradle that did not belong to Him, so now He rested in another's sepulcher. And again,



as in Bethlehem where Joseph helped Mary place Jesus in His crib, she is today assisted by another Joseph in laying Him in His tomb.

It was a new sorrow for our Lady to have to leave Jesus, and yet, even now, after her long agony there was no weakening in her. Neither in soul nor body did Mary know an instant's wavering. Her love and fortitude surpassed incomparably the love and fortitude of the martyrs, as her sufferings immeasurably surpassed theirs. Thus the liturgy hails Mary as the "First Rose of the martyrs" as well as "Lily among virgins." At the Communion of the Mass for the feast of the Seven Dolors, the Church exclaims, "Happy the senses of the Blessed Virgin, which without dying earned the palm of martyrdom beneath the cross of our Lord." The Gospel which so unobtrusively mentions the presence of Mary on Calvary will speak of her no more. It will mention the Galilean women who came to the holy sepulcher to complete the embalming on the morrow of the Sabbath, but Mary disappears. Yet it was she who felt during a night, a day, and still another night, with deeper grief than anyone, the frightful void caused by the departure of Jesus. Truly Mary has kept well the secret of her dolors. The scattered hints contained in Scripture have been lovingly preserved by the Church, and her sacred liturgy adds its compassionate and reverent comments; but the heart of the mystery is only to be penetrated by the light of living faith shed upon the inspired words. It is only to be reached by the soul who contemplates these words with the understanding and wisdom that are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let us ask our Lady, the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, to lead us herself to that insight into her sorrows which is beyond the reach of human words.

Holy Mother! pierce me through;  
In my heart each wound renew  
Of my Savior crucified.

Let me share with thee His pain,  
Who for all my sins was slain,  
Who for me in torments died.

Let me mingle tears with thee,  
Mourning Him who mourned for me  
All the days that I may live.

By the cross with thee to stay,  
There with thee to weep and pray,  
Is all I ask of thee to give.

APRIL 5

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### *The Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem*



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“And most of the crowd spread their cloaks upon the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees, and strewing them on the road. And the crowds that went before him, and those that followed, kept crying out, saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’” (Mt. 21:8, 9.)

The day of our Savior’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem was the most glorious of His mortal life. It was the divine will that the Jews also should give external acknowledgment of the Kingship of Jesus, as the Gentiles had done in the homage of the Magi shortly after His birth.

○ Jesus, grant that like the crowd which surrounded You on the day of Your triumph, I may glorify You in thought, word, and action.

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As, with Bethany behind them, our Savior and the disciples were ascending the eastern slope of Mount Olivet, Jesus directed two of His followers to go to a village called Bethphage, which lay before them, and bring to Him an ass which they would find tied with her foal. If the owner of the ass offered objection, they were to answer that the Lord had need of them. All happened as Jesus had described, and when the disciples returned with the animals, they spread their cloaks on them in place of a saddle and the usual coverings. Jesus mounted the foal, leaving the ass to follow behind. Then, probably, the disciples formed an escort about the Savior, and the people of the neighborhood, observing the festive procession, doubtless joined it. In their enthusiasm they spread their garments on the road to serve as rugs — a gesture which has always been regarded as a mark of great respect. They cut branches from the trees and strewed them, also, in our Savior's path.

The disciples and the crowd together cried out as they descended Mount Olivet, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes! Hosanna in the highest! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" The pilgrims who had come for the Pasch and were encamped about the Holy City also joined the procession and, infected by the general enthusiasm, added their cries of praise. As the shouting throng entered Jerusalem, the whole city was aroused and all asked, "*Who is this?*" But the crowds kept on saying, "*This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.*"

This triumphal procession in honor of our Savior was a solemn testimony of gratitude to Him for His miracles, and it was also a proclamation of Him as King and Messiah; for the cries, the palms, the olive and myrtle branches formed

part of the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, a Messianic feast. Moreover it was the fulfillment of Zacharias' prophecy that the Messiah would come to Sion *riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass*. And there is still another striking circumstance which added to our Savior's glory in His triumph. Although He came so modestly and humbly, for the external trappings of His triumph did not even belong to Him, He instantly evoked the homage of the crowd. The enthusiasm of the disciples, which was the work of the Holy Spirit, communicated itself to all hearts. There were no obstacles. The Pharisees tried in vain to quell the general rejoicing and Pilate himself, so opposed ordinarily to all public demonstrations, especially near the feast of the Passover, seems not to have disturbed himself over this triumph. It was our Savior's will to prepare for the ignominy of His passion by this day of glory, just as He would prepare for His eternal glory by the ignominy of the passion.

“O God, whom to love above all is righteousness, multiply in us the gifts of Thine ineffable grace; and since in the death of Thy Son Thou hast given us the hope for those things which we believe, grant us through His resurrection to attain the end for which we long” (Collect for the Blessing of the Palms).

APRIL 6

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### *The Second Cleansing of the Temple*



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“And he entered the temple, and began to cast out those who were selling and buying in it” (Lk. 19:45).

Despite their enthusiastic reception of Him, no one in Jerusalem

appears to have offered Jesus hospitality, for on the evening of Palm Sunday He and the Apostles returned to Bethany. Perhaps He spent the night in prayer, but early in the morning He came to the Temple.

O Jesus, grant me a vivid realization of Your Eucharistic presence.

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When our Savior entered the Temple on the morning after His triumph, He found its outer approaches invaded by a noisy crowd of merchants and money-changers. A kind of market had been set up in the Court of the Gentiles where worshipers, especially those from a distance, might purchase sacrificial victims. Although this was the second time that He drove the buyers and sellers from the Temple, Jesus proceeded with moderation and prudence. On the previous day, after His triumphal entry into the Holy City, He had merely *looked around upon all things* in the Temple. To His sorrow He found the disorder and abuse which He had banished three years before again defiling His Father's House, owing, no doubt, to the weakness or indifference or cupidity of the chief priests and the Temple authorities. Probably He showed His disapproval at His first visit on the day of His triumph, but He saw that more decisive action was needed; and so, on the following morning, He undertook the second cleansing of the Temple. And now He acted with greater severity than the first time, for on this occasion He overturned the seats of those who sold doves, instead of merely admonishing them to remove their wares. He also denounced the carrying of vessels through the Temple, which was apparently being used as an ordinary thoroughfare.

Then He began to teach saying, "*Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of thieves.*" The second cleansing

of the Temple, like the first, was a symbol of our Savior's mission. He had come to restore to the ancient religion its purity, to fulfill its prophecies, and to bring it to perfection. St. Matthew alone relates that, after Jesus had driven the vendors from the Temple, *the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them*, and that the children cried out in the Temple, saying, "*Hosanna to the Son of David.*" All this, but especially the Messianic cry within the very Temple walls, only added to the indignation of our Savior's enemies. The chief priests and the Scribes said to Him, "*Dost thou hear what these are saying?*" Jesus answered, "*Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?'*" Thus Jesus tried to bring home to these students of the Law how little they understood its true meaning. In quoting from the eighth psalm He intended to show that the homage of the humble and the lowly is agreeable to God.

O Jesus, urgently and repeatedly You teach us the lesson of reverence for the house of God. And the church wherein You dwell with us in the Holy Eucharist is far holier than the Temple. You are also in my soul by Your grace and daily You honor it with Your Eucharistic presence. Grant me the grace of conducting myself always with reverential fear before You in the Blessed Sacrament, and let a continual remembrance of Your indwelling in my soul maintain in me the reserve and dignity befitting Your holy presence.

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*Jesus Challenged by the Rulers*

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“By what authority dost thou do these things? And who gave thee this authority?” (Mt. 21:23.)

The chief priests and authorities of the Temple considered the act of Jesus in driving the vendors out of the temple an encroachment upon their rights. Moreover, they could not tolerate this exposition of their greed and lack of faith before the great gathering of pilgrims who had come for the feast of the Pasch.

O Jesus, increase in me the spirit of devotedness.

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Shocked by our Savior's bold stroke in cleansing the Temple, the chief priests said nothing at the time, but on Tuesday when He appeared, they demanded the reason for His conduct the day before. Their intention in this was, clearly, to execute a major step in their plot against Jesus. They made their demand publicly, in the Temple, and in the presence of the people. Besides, they proceeded in an official manner. The deputation consisted of Scribes and other notables in addition to the priests. They presented themselves in the name of the Sanhedrin and probably with a great external display of their authority and prestige. Furthermore, their conduct was all arrogance and artifice. When Jesus had cleansed the Temple at the beginning of His public life, they had asked for a miracle which would prove His right to act thus. Now they challenged Him to tell them by what authority He acted and from whom He had received it. Whatever His answer, whether that the power was His own or that it came from God, they hoped to trap Him.

After the manner of rabbinic discussion our Savior answered question with question: "*Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?*" This rejoinder was evasive and rightly so, because the question which evoked it had been prompted by insincerity. Besides, the priests themselves had once asked this same question of John and between that day and the time of John's martyrdom it had become increasingly evident to men of good will that John was a man of God and his work of heavenly origin. Moreover, St. John the Baptist had expressed himself formally on the subject of the Person of Jesus and His right to exercise power. His baptism here stands for his mission as Precursor. If, then, the priests were to say that the baptism of John was from God, they themselves would answer the question they had put to Jesus. This answer they could not give, for it would destroy their case. But with the people present and listening to this interview, they dared not openly say otherwise. In an awkward attempt to escape the embarrassing dilemma, therefore, they answered that they did not know the source of John's authority to baptize.

This reply was an act of cowardice and an infamous falsehood; it represented a formal rupture with the past and with the prophets, of whom St. John the Baptist was the last. In the face of such malice and hypocrisy, our Savior was perfectly justified in refusing to declare by what authority He had driven the buyers and sellers from the Temple.

Divine Savior, Your intrepid courage is once more revealed in this mystery. To act as You did in driving the vendors from the Temple was, under the circumstances, a truly dangerous act, for it unleashed against You all the more the hatred of the Jewish priesthood. But when there was question of zeal for the glory of God and the honor of His house, You seem always to have resorted to the more terrifying external acts of Your



authority and power. You also reveal here again Your wisdom and prudence. In spite of their cleverness Your enemies were forced to recognize their defeat and to yield in confusion. How instructive it is, also, O Jesus, to see You employing the last days of Your life in teaching and in works of zeal, and how moving to hear You giving testimony at this time to Your Precursor! You began Your public mission with St. John the Baptist and it is with him that You close it. O my Savior, help me to learn from You how to be both fearless and prudent, how to be wise as the serpent and simple as the dove.

APRIL 8

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### *The Betrayal by Judas*



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“What are you willing to give me, and I will deliver him to you?” (Mt. 26:15.)

It was probably on the Wednesday following our Savior's triumph that Judas made his offer to the chief priests and elders of the people as they were assembled in council. The immediate cause of Judas' treacherous act seems to have been his resentment of his Master's reprimand at the supper in Bethany and also the loss of the price of the ointment with which Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, had anointed Jesus.

Divine Savior, grant me a salutary fear of all willful sin and an instant awareness of the occasions of mortal sin.

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The obduracy and ingratitude of the hardened sinner is always a mystery, but a remote cause of Judas' crime is to be found in the baseness of his character, marks of which were inconstancy and want of firmness. He was also given

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to worldly thoughts and views and to ambition and cupidity. With these bad dispositions of soul he lost faith little by little. Perhaps in the beginning he believed in Jesus sincerely, but at the time of our Savior's discourse on the mystery of the Eucharist at Capharnaum, Judas no longer had faith. Jesus Himself revealed this when He said, "*Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.*" There may have been also a certain restlessness and discontent with the circumstances of his life. Judas was weary, perhaps, of the wandering existence led by his Master and of His perpetual renunciation; for this reason, it may be, he sought to draw some temporal advantage from his lot and, as St. John tells us, formed the habit of taking what was put into the common purse, which was in his care.

Then, too, the private admonitions that the Master had doubtless given him irritated and weighed upon Judas. We may also infer that, because the traitor had lost personal devotion to our Savior through disillusionment in his false Messianic hopes, the enthusiastic love of the other Apostles and friends of the Savior only annoyed him. Perhaps their generous devotion seemed to him excessive and aroused in him an actual aversion to his Master. These last-mentioned dispositions appear to have manifested themselves at Bethany when Mary poured the ointment upon the head and feet of Jesus. The remonstrance of Judas on this occasion showed a want of respect for our Savior and an insensibility which already makes us fear for him. Still another cause of his fall, the influence of which extended to all the other factors that have been mentioned, was the action of the devil. His power over Judas became stronger as Judas yielded more and more to his passions and to temptations against faith.

A particular outrage which must have been especially pain-

ful to our Savior was that Judas consummated his crime on his own initiative. He himself went to the chief priests and shamelessly inquired what they would give him as the price for the betrayal. Judas knew well with whom he was dealing, yet he agreed to deliver Jesus into their hands, and for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave among the Jews. Even worse, it would seem that Judas would have been willing to close the transaction at a still lower price.

O Jesus, what humiliation and sorrow Judas caused You by his betrayal! It is impossible to understand how he, an Apostle, could have descended to this most odious of crimes. But let my reflection upon the fall of Judas inspire me with salutary fear and lead me to resolve to avoid the occasions of sin and to permit myself no compromise with my passions. And how sad it is to think, my Jesus, that Judas' abominable crime is repeated in every mortal sin; every time grace, the truths of faith, the interests of souls and the Church are sacrificed for a temporal good! Unhappily, such sacrifices are not rare in the world. As for myself, O merciful Savior, if Your grace keeps me from committing great sins, must I not humble myself for the many times that I have at least bargained with Your enemy, that self-love might be gratified and pride indulged? Forgive me once again and keep me safe *under the shadow of your wings*.

APRIL 9

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### *The Institution of the Eucharist*



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“And having taken bread, he gave thanks and broke, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In like manner he took

also the cup after the supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which shall be shed for you" (Lk. 22:19, 20).

After washing the feet of His Apostles, our Savior instituted the Holy Eucharist. It was the climax of the Last Supper, the realization of the great promise He had made the year before in the synagogue at Capharnaum, and the fulfillment of the mystery foreshadowed in the two multiplications of the loaves. O Jesus in the Eucharist, grant me the grace of offering You a pleasing homage of gratitude and reparation.

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After the eating of the paschal lamb, when the moment had come for the blessing of the unleavened bread, Jesus took into His hands one of the three loaves that were placed on the Paschal table, consecrated it, broke it into as many portions as there were guests present, and distributed them, saying, "*This is my body.*" Then, before passing the ritual "cup of blessing," He gave thanks and said, "*All of you drink of this; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many unto the forgiveness of sins.*" The Paschal bread and wine were no longer bread and wine; they had become the Body and Blood of the Savior; and not a lifeless Body or isolated Blood, but the Body and Blood such as they were when Jesus spoke the words of consecration.

Thus were celebrated the first Holy Mass and the first Communion. This was a moment of vital importance for the Church, since in instituting the Holy Eucharist, Jesus took up His life in this world under a new form, inaugurated the Holy Sacrifice of the New Law, and founded the Catholic priesthood. Now death could come and deprive us of the visible presence of our Savior, since He would be no less really and substantially present among us and in His Church.

The Church is literally the Church of Jesus Christ, for He is present in her and she is His Spouse and His Mystical Body. Without the Eucharist, our Savior would be twenty centuries away from us.

Moreover, we now possessed a new sacrifice, whereby earth became precious even in the eyes of heaven, in that it was now able to offer to heaven an inexhaustible treasure, an ever pleasing fragrance. Equally splendid are the blessings of Holy Communion. Without the Eucharist, what would this earth be for our souls? Even in the fullness of earthly happiness and in the abundance of all good material things, our souls would languish and pine away; for besides this Bread of Life we have only perishable nourishment. What happiness and honor for us, also, that so large a number of the children of men are called to participate in the glorious Priesthood of Jesus Christ! The Holy Eucharist, the Holy Mass, should, rightly, be the center, the axis, so to speak, of our thoughts and our love; rather, they should be our life.

On the night of that last supper,  
Seated with His chosen band,  
He, the Paschal Victim eating,  
First fulfills the Law's command;  
Then as food to all His brethren  
Gives Himself with His own hand.

Word made flesh, the bread of nature,  
By His word to flesh He turns;  
Wine into His blood He changes;  
What though sense no change discerns?  
Only be the heart in earnest,  
Faith her lesson quickly learns.

Down in adoration falling,  
Lo, the sacred Host we hail,

Lo, o'er ancient forms departing  
Newer rites of grace prevail;  
Faith for all defects supplying,  
Where the feeble senses fail.

To the everlasting Father  
And the Son who reigns on high,  
With the Holy Ghost proceeding  
Forth from each eternally,  
Be salvation, honor, blessing,  
Might and endless majesty.

APRIL 10

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### *The Crucifixion of Jesus*



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“And when they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there” (Lk. 23:33).

Jesus, having arrived at Mount Calvary, the place of execution, was stripped of His garments and nailed to the cross.

O Jesus crucified, grant that I may enter more deeply into the mystery of Your passion and death.

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No moment in the history of the world is so memorable, so awesome and moving, as the moment when the cross of Jesus Christ was raised on Calvary. And when the cross with its precious Burden was finally in its place, dominating the horizon as the mysterious Sign of divine justice and mercy, the crowd surged toward it. *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself,”* Jesus had said. For the moment, this movement was one of hatred, but it

was presently to be a surge of love whose great waves were to beat against this rock and the holy Cross until the end of time.

The Evangelists draw a discreet veil over the slow agony of Jesus on the cross; but having hung there for about three hours and having suffered the loss of blood which follows upon crucifixion, Jesus died really and truly the death of the cross. But He died freely and because He willed it. The sufferings He had endured since His agony in the Garden of Gethsemani were in themselves, naturally speaking, capable of causing His death; but He could be deprived of life only with His consent. This consent Jesus gave at about the ninth hour, when, having uttered a loud cry, He bowed His head and *gave up his spirit*. Our Savior bowed His head before dying and not afterward as other men do, in order to indicate His voluntary consent to His death.

Then, His lifeless body hung upon the cross, the worthy and holy Victim of the infinite love of His heart for God and for men. The sacrifice was consummated. It was at about the time of the evening sacrifice in the Temple, and perhaps at that very moment they were beginning the immolation of the Paschal Lamb. But the long wail of the trumpets in the Temple courts was, in reality, an announcement to heaven and earth and to the souls in Limbo that the great Sacrifice of the true Paschal Lamb had just been offered. The death of Jesus is the model, the crown, the consummation and source of all sanctity in death and also in life; for if we live, we draw our life from His life-giving death. He merited all for us by His sacrifice.

O Sacred Head, bowed in death, I adore You. Sacred Hands, that wrought so many cures and bestowed so many blessings, heal my soul and bless me. Divine Feet, weary with seeking the

lost sheep of Israel, lead all men into the true fold. May Your precious blood, O Jesus, cleanse me of my sins and set my heart aflame with Your love. Attach me to Your cross by the nails of obedience, poverty, and mortification. O Good Shepherd, You have laid down Your life for Your sheep, and with what patience and love! Even more, You have given us Your body and blood to be our food, Mary as our Mother, the Church as our home here below, and heaven as our eternal dwelling.

What more could I ask of You than the pardon that You sought for Your executioners; since by my sins I also have contributed to Your death? Grant in addition to the excess of Your love for me the grace of living and the happiness of dying for You. Let the sight of Your cross give me courage. Permit that my eyes may remain fixed upon this symbol of mercy and forgiveness, when they are closed to the light of this world. Accept, merciful Jesus, my loving gratitude for this final proof of Your love for me. O Incarnate Son of the Eternal Father, I adore Your sacred body, Your precious blood, and the holy cross that have brought us our salvation!

APRIL 11

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### *The Burial of Jesus*



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“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. There, accordingly, because of the Preparation Day of the Jews, for the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus” (Jn. 19:41, 42).

The necessity of haste appears to have allowed time only for the



wrapping of the body of Jesus in the shroud, previously sprinkled with preservative spices. Then it was laid in the new tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. An enormous stone, shaped like a millstone, was rolled in front of the opening; then all withdrew to observe the Sabbath rest.

O Mary, help me to imitate your spirit of faith.

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The body of Jesus, although separated for a brief interval from His soul, was still united to the Person of the Son of God. Divine too was the blood that drenched the rock and soil of Calvary. Nor did the soul of Jesus, during its separation from His body, lose for an instant its union with the Word. At the moment of its separation from His body, His soul descended into limbo. *Put to death indeed in the flesh*, writes St. Peter, *he was brought to life in the spirit in which also he went and preached to those spirits that were in prison*. How majestic must have been the entrance of Jesus into this abode of the just, and what joy He must have brought to the holy exiles there! We may imagine them offering Him their adoration with transports of joy — all the just of the Old Testament, from our first parents to St. John the Baptist, St. Elizabeth, and St. Joseph, all the prophets, patriarchs, kings, priests, all the ancestors of our Savior.

With what divine complacency Jesus must have looked upon this portion of the Church purchased by His blood, for its merits were applied to the souls of the just, by the mercy of the Eternal Father, long before it was shed on Calvary. The power of Jesus, although not His presence, was felt also in hell where now and forever at the name of Jesus, every knee must bend. The demons had instigated the Jews to crucify the Incarnate Son of God, but by this same act they had worked for the salvation of the world. The weapons

which they thought to use against Him were now turned against themselves.

The Mother of Jesus passed the night of the crucifixion in Jerusalem, doubtless going over in her memory the sorrowful events she had witnessed. With her were the heart-broken Magdalene and the other holy women. John, Peter, and the other Apostles and disciples were overwhelmed with grief. All except Mary seemed to have forgotten the promise of the Resurrection. The Church in today's *Tenebrae* service represents the men as saying, "Behold how the just man dies, and no one takes it to heart; and just men are taken away and no one considers it; the just man has been taken away from the face of iniquity; and his memory shall be in peace." The holy women, for their part, were preparing for the morrow's visit to the sepulcher, when they expected to complete the anointing of our Savior's body. Mary alone lived in the expectation of His triumph. As her chaste womb had encompassed Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain, so on this first Easter eve, by her unwavering faith, Mary comprised in her single self the whole Church.

*Sing praise to the Lord, you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger lasts but a moment; a lifetime, his good will. At nightfall, weeping enters in, but with the dawn, rejoicing. O my Jesus, You became the captive of death to deliver me from eternal death. I hail Your tomb and venerate Your thorn-marked head, Your open side, and Your transpierced hands and feet. I offer You the sentiments of Your desolate Mother and Your beloved disciple. I beg You to bury me with You that I may rise again with You.*

*The Resurrection of Our Savior*




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“The Lord has risen indeed, Alleluia” (invitatory of Matins for Easter Sunday).

Easter is the most glorious feast of the God-Man. It is, as the martyrology terms it, the “Solemnity of solemnities, our Passover.”

O Jesus, my risen Savior, grant that I may find in Your resurrection a great renewal of faith, hope, and love.

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At daybreak on the third day after His death, Jesus came forth from the sepulcher, His glorified body passing through the stone that closed the entrance to the tomb. Pilate’s seal was on that stone and a guard had been set to see that it remained unbroken. The seal was still intact and the stone unmoved, but Jesus was free. The end of His earthly mission resembled its commencement. He emerged from the sepulcher in the manner in which He had come forth from the virginal womb of Mary — as a ray of light passing through crystal. And again, as when Jesus expired on the cross, the earth trembled, but now it was for joy. *And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and drawing near rolled back the stone and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment like snow. And for fear of him the guards were terrified, and became like dead men.* To the violence of Christ’s enemies the angels now opposed their own victorious power. Then, after the guards, by the divine mercy, recovered their senses, they

hurried to the city to report the empty tomb. Thus, even against their will, the leaders of the people were given a revelation, as it were, of the Resurrection; and their informants were the very ones whom they themselves had placed at the tomb to forestall any attempt at deceit.

Meanwhile, Jesus, the Son of God and Vanquisher of death, but also the Son of Mary, had hastened to His most holy Mother. She had stood beside the cross, uniting the sacrifice of her mother's heart with His sacrifice; it was right that she should be the first to share the joy of the Resurrection. The Gospel does not record this apparition of Jesus to His Mother; there was no need of it, for this first visit of our risen Savior was prompted solely by love—the love of Jesus and Mary for each other. It was not intended to serve as a proof of the Resurrection, as were the other manifestations, fully described in the Gospel, to the holy women and the Apostles and disciples. The Fathers of the Church, however, beginning with St. Ambrose, testify to this first visit of Jesus to His Mother; even had they been silent, every Christian heart would have of itself reached this conviction. Who that knows Jesus and Mary would refuse to accept such a tradition? And who would not accept also the pious belief that our Savior rose so early from the tomb on Easter day in order to satisfy the ardent longings of His dear and most afflicted Mother? If her prayers had hastened the moment of the Incarnation and that of the public miracles of her Son, was it not fitting that she should have hastened also the commencement of His risen life?

Mary, dearest Mother, who would attempt to describe the joy of this first meeting with your risen Son? Your gladness now is a just reward for the unwavering faith in the Resurrection that dwelt in your heart during the three days when all except you

had lost it. Your eyes, dimmed by wakefulness and tears, now flash with delight on beholding the brightness which announces the coming of Jesus. He calls you by name in tones of joy and love. He embraces you with the most tender filial affection. That body which only three days ago you saw dead and covered with blood is now radiant with life and shining with divinity. My good Mother, obtain for me from Jesus a steadfast faith, courageous hope, and love that is ardent and selfless like yours.

APRIL 13

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### *Spiritual Resurrection*



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“He has risen, he is not here” (Mk. 16:6).

Represent to yourself the glorified humanity of the Word made flesh.

O my Savior, risen from the dead, may Your resurrection be for me the model of a new life.

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The mystery of the Resurrection is the foundation of our faith and our hope; it is also a symbol representing a true conversion of the soul, a spiritual resurrection. Like the resurrection of Christ, every sincere conversion is real, manifest, and lasting. Our rebirth to the life of divine grace from the life of nature and self-seeking should be as true and incontestable as the resurrection of our divine Model. The great truth that Jesus really arose from the dead is supported by His own predictions, by His apparitions to the disciples and the holy women, by the testimony of St. Thomas, who was permitted to put his finger in the place of the wounds, and

by the more than five hundred witnesses who saw Jesus ascend into heaven.

The resurrection of our Savior was a true resurrection before God and men. As we contemplate this glorious dogma with the eyes of faith, let us see whether we too have arisen without disguise and hypocrisy from the life of nature to the life of grace; whether there is really nothing in our hearts that is contrary to the law of God and our Rule; whether any reservations belie the total sacrifice we made of ourselves by our three vows. A true Sister of the Holy Cross has nothing in common with the children of this world. She has no longer any concern with the occupations and pleasures of those who are dead in the eyes of faith; she thinks, speaks, and acts like the living, that is, like the saints, like Jesus Himself.

The resurrection of our Savior was also evident and manifest; for, in order to convince His disciples that He had truly risen from the dead, He assumed a sensible corporeal form and even allowed the disciples to touch Him. Our spiritual renewal should also be such that even a close observation of our conduct would not reveal anything that would belie the reality of the change. There is a certain air of recollection and reserve, a certain way of speaking and acting, which reveal the new and supernaturalized dispositions of the heart. Again, our risen Savior will die no more; He dwells eternally in glory and triumph. Unlike Lazarus, who was miraculously brought forth from the tomb, Jesus will not re-enter the grave. If we are to imitate Him in the order of grace, we must never fall back into our former carelessness and sinful habits. This permanent change we can achieve with the help of God. Let us beg Jesus through Mary's intercession the grace of advancing steadily toward perfection.

“O fragrant Flower of the Virgin-Branch, filled with the dew of the seven Gifts, ruddy as the rose and fair as the lily! Whence that merciful design which made Thee stoop to help this little world, sharing our nature, that Thou mightest redeem unhappy mankind, and taking the likeness of sin, O Thou, the sinless One?

“Sovereign Lord, who hast made Thyself the Brother of Thy creature, man! O Hope of our ultimate resurrection and eternal glorification! We beseech Thee, by the promise made to Abraham’s seed, give us strength . . . and make us who were sharers in our first parents’ death to be fellow-members of Thy life. Unite our weakness with Thy strength and grant us, O blessed Paschal Lamb, the pastures of eternal life” (from a medieval German Sequence).

APRIL 14

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*The Apparition to Mary Magdalene*



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“Now when he had risen from the dead early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils” (Mk. 16:9).

Let us try to imagine and to share the sentiments of St. Mary Magdalene at the moment when Jesus made Himself known to her.

Lord Jesus, deign to fill my soul with lasting spiritual joy.

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Not without reason does the Church, borrowing the words of the Psalmist, term the day of the Resurrection pre-eminently the “day of the Lord”; for Jesus, rising from the dead, was Himself the beautiful dawn which heralded the dispersion of

our darkness. We should, therefore, celebrate with deep spiritual joy and extraordinary solemnity not only the glorious feast of Easter, but also the seven weeks that follow it, like a prolonged octave leading us to Pentecost. The spirit of the Church during these fifty days is one of triumphant joy, which continually bursts forth in the liturgy of the Paschal season.

Holy Mother Church especially directs our attention during this period to the manifestations of Jesus during the forty days preceding the feast of the Ascension, that we may be constantly reminded of the new life we must lead in order to rise with our divine Master. The first apparition of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel was to St. Mary Magdalene. But she, entirely preoccupied with her desire to anoint the dead body of her Lord, did not recognize Him in the "gardener" whom she met at the tomb. Her love itself distracted her, for it was a love not sufficiently guided by faith. Her longing to find Jesus as she thought Him to be prevented her from seeing Him as He really was—living and real. He called her by name; and the single word "Mary" in the tones she knew so well was enough. "Master!" exclaimed the enraptured and humble Magdalene. All was now clear; she believed. Mary Magdalene, as a reward for her love and fidelity, became the first witness of the Resurrection, the bearer of the good news to the Apostles. Still other apparitions followed on that first Easter day: to the Magdalene's companions, Salome and Mary, the mother of James, to Peter and John, to the disciples of Emmaus, to the Apostles gathered in the upper room. But even before the men whom the Son of God had deigned to make His Apostles, He honored the generous women who had been faithful to Him during His passion. At this peak of His earthly glory He made three humble women the



heralds of His triumph, just as He had first summoned to His crib the poor shepherds of Bethlehem.

How true are the inspired words of Isaias: *My thoughts are not your thoughts; nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord!* We should have summoned the whole world—kings and people—to pay homage at the crib; we should have proclaimed immediately to all nations the resurrection of the Crucified, the victory won over death, the restoration of mankind to their heavenly inheritance. But He who is the *power and wisdom of God*, Christ Jesus our Lord, did not even begin at once to instruct His Apostles. He first consoled and affectionately honored the humble and courageous women who had followed Him to Calvary.

“Universal Conqueror! Thou hast vanquished death and entered into the joys of heaven. O mercy of Christ, how great, how sublime, how beautiful, how sweet, how tender art Thou! . . . Purchased by the blood of the infinitely merciful Lamb, the Church glitters with the ruby flowers of her redemption. . . . O Jesus, our merciful King, forgive us our sins, loose our fetters. Grant that Thy elect may rise with Thee to heavenly glory, and to their merits give recompense” (from an Easter Sequence of the Middle Ages).

APRIL 15

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### *The Visitations of Jesus*



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“To them also he showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, during forty days appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

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Imagine that you are in the Cenacle at the moment when our Savior appears to St. Thomas, or at the tomb, when He shows Himself to St. Mary Magdalene, or with the disciples of Emmaus, when they recognize Him in the breaking of the bread.

Divine Savior, grant that from now on I may profit fully by the visits of Your grace.

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To whom does our risen Savior appear? To the holy women, the Apostles, and certain of the disciples; that is, to the humble and fervent. And such still, ordinarily, are the souls whom Jesus deigns to visit, and even, sometimes, to favor with sensible manifestations of His presence; for the humble and the fervent are disposed to receive the divine light with faith and be led by it. Jesus assumed the appearance of a gardener for Mary Magdalene, and of a wayfarer for the disciples of Emmaus; but by a word, a gesture, which escaped Him, as it were, they recognized their Lord and their hearts were instantly transported with love. If His nearness is not always sensibly felt and made certain to us, we may yet discern it by the peace and serenity which His visits bring to our souls. We know it by the joy and consolation with which they are filled, just as the disciples were *glad* when they saw the Lord. The spirit of darkness, on the contrary, fills us with gloomy, troubled, and discouraged thoughts, with fear and dejection. It would be well for us to ask ourselves which of these influences is uppermost in our daily thoughts and actions; if we are an easy prey to moods of depression and sadness, the reason may often be found in our pride and our want of ardor in serving God.

The apparitions of Jesus were intended, among other purposes, to confirm the wavering faith of the Apostles, to prepare

them for a long separation, and to give them courage to undertake all things for their Master's glory. So it was that Thomas, the most unbelieving of the Twelve and also the one favored with the most striking proof of the reality of the Resurrection, gave evidence later of exceptional faith. No other Apostle preached with more zeal nor in more distant regions, for Thomas brought the Gospel even to remote India where, according to tradition, he suffered martyrdom. Jesus favors us also, and many times with the visits of His grace; but, perhaps, a want of recollection or of generosity or of faith prevents us from responding fully to His mercies toward us. Let us endeavor to realize how unworthy we are to receive the divine gifts and determine to remove at any cost the obstacles which may now be impeding the flow of grace into our souls.

O divine Master, it is my want of humility and my lukewarmness that prevent me from recognizing Your action in all that happens to me. Like the disciples of Emmaus I am often disconcerted by the cross. Perhaps my courage and faith, like theirs, frequently depend in some measure upon felt or external evidences of success. Let not my understanding of heavenly things, especially of the mystery of the cross, be obscured by self-love, distractedness, or a want of detachment. Deign, O Jesus, to instruct me interiorly as to the sinful habit or inordinate attachment which most impedes my growth in Your grace; and in Your mercy help me to remove it completely and permanently from my soul.

*The Disciples of Emmaus*



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“And behold two of them were going that very day to a village called Emmaus, which is sixty stadia from Jerusalem. And they were talking to each other about all these things that had happened” (Lk. 24:13, 14).

In the afternoon of Easter day, two disciples, one of whom was named Cleophas, left Jerusalem for the village Emmaus, about seven miles northwest of the city.

Divine Master, take from me the aversion for the cross, which is so deeply rooted in my nature.

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The two disciples, returning, perhaps, to their home, were conversing together as they walked along of their mutual disillusionment. The Master was dead. He whom they had regarded as a great prophet, the true Savior of Israel, had died ignominiously, condemned by the chief authorities of the nation. His work was ruined, His Messianic mission a complete failure. His death was for these disciples the proof of this fact. It was now the third day and He had not yet attested His resurrection by a triumphant apparition to accomplish the deliverance of Israel. Reports of the empty tomb and the claims of some women that angels had appeared to them only confused and perplexed Cleophas and his companion. To them it seemed impossible to reconcile the death of the Savior on the cross with the idea they had formed of the Messiah. Indeed, never was the Church to know a darker hour than that through which she was then passing. Yet, at that very moment especially was it necessary to hope.

It was the mystery of the cross which disconcerted the disciples of Emmaus and troubled their minds and hearts. This was why our Savior called them "*foolish ones and slow of heart to believe.*"

Our Savior joined the travelers without making Himself known, perhaps in the guise of a pilgrim returning home after the Paschal celebration. His words, full of instruction and consolation, showed them that His passion and death had not been unexpected, nor were they to be thought of as a catastrophe or a defeat. Centuries before they had been foretold by the prophets and in the history of Israel. He was the Messiah precisely because He had suffered. Then Jesus unfolded before them the divine plan of the Redemption which He summed up in the words, "*Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?*" With what condescension and amiability our Savior did all this! Of His own accord He approached the two travelers, questioned them kindly as to the cause of their dejection, and expounded the Holy Scripture at length for them in a manner so sublime that their hearts burned within them. Yet they were not Apostles, but simple disciples.

Then He accepted their invitation to sit at table with them and there He revealed His glory in the breaking of the bread. Some of the Fathers believe that the Savior gave the disciples His sacred Body in the Eucharist. The table of repast thus became an altar and the invited Guest manifested Himself as the glorious High Priest of the New Testament. The disciples owed their great privilege, first, to the goodness of our Savior, who is ever ready to help and console those who encounter the cross in His service. They also merited it by their faithful attachment to Jesus, by the reverent manner in which they spoke of Him, and, finally,

by their hospitable and grateful invitation. To our charity toward others Jesus responds by exercising His charity toward us. Hope was now reborn in the hearts of the disciples; they rose from the table and returned immediately to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled and to the new reports of the apparition of Jesus to Simon they added their account of what had happened to them and how they recognized the Lord in the breaking of the bread.

O my Savior, I adore Your great goodness and Your tender care for Your own which You reveal in this mystery. You know each one of us. You are ever present with us to instruct and console. How important is Your teaching! It speaks of the cross in Your life, in the life of the Church, in the life of each of us. Always the cross, the inevitable, inexplicable cross! How carefully You removed for Your disciples the scandal of the cross, which is imbedded in our nature! Deign to instruct me also that I may learn the great gain there is for me in suffering and humiliation.

APRIL 17

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### *The Hope of Our Resurrection*



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“I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust. Whom I myself shall see, and not another — and from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing” (Job 19:25–27).

These words were uttered by holy Job when he was in utter abandonment and in the most painful physical suffering.

Divine Redeemer, grant me a living and practical faith in the resurrection of the body.

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Jesus, by *swallowing up death*, as the Apostle St. Peter strongly expresses it, made possible the fulfillment of Job's hope and the hope of all mankind. His death removed from our own its bitterness and humiliation; henceforth, the grave would be viewed under a new aspect. The earth which receives the bodies of the dead will one day yield them up, as it yields the planted seed, a hundredfold. At the sound of the archangel's trumpet the whole human race will rise from the grave and proclaim the final defeat of death. One of the joys of the angels in heaven is gazing upon the glorified human bodies of Jesus and Mary—of Jesus who even as Man is their King and of Mary whom they serve as their Queen. What a day of festival it will be for these angelic spirits when the just are clothed again with the robe of their flesh, sanctified, and made worthy of reunion with their radiant souls!

The sensual man, to use St. Paul's term, may accept the doctrine of the bodily resurrection as an article of faith, but it is not for him the conscious object of his hope. He regards his body as an instrument of self-gratification which, since it lives for so short a time, must be the more fully and quickly gratified. He is, in reality, the enemy of his body; and yet the charge of being hostile to man's bodily nature is the one that is most often brought against the Church. But how could the body be accorded a deeper respect, the characteristic of true love, than that given it by Holy Mother Church? She it is who teaches us the great truth that the human body is destined for endless glory and happiness and who instructs us how to make it serve *justice unto sanctification*. In its last moments she honors the body with the sacred oils of Extreme Unction; she burns incense over it in death as over a holy thing; and to those who love the

departed she addresses the consoling words of St. Paul, who admonishes us not to grieve *even as others who have no hope*.

What is this hope? It is that which comforted Job: *and from my flesh I shall see God*. The soul is more than the body, it is true, but the body is an essential part of our being and, like the soul, it has a sublime destiny; we should, therefore, treat our body with reverence. If we now chastise it and keep it under subjection, it is because its present state requires such treatment. We punish the body because we love it. Let us, by faith, contemplate the glorious future for which God has created us, body and soul; only the light of faith can enable us to penetrate this mystery on earth. And faith, in turn, quickens love and hope, as we reflect upon what the Son of God has done for our bodies as well as our souls by His resurrection from the dead.

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; his right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm. The Lord has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice. He has remembered his kindness and faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God (Ps. 97:1-3).*

APRIL 18

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## *Our Lady and the Church*



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“Because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20).

These words of Genesis referring to Eve are spiritually applicable only to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother.



O Mary, teach me to recognize and love the Church as the earthly counterpart of you, my dearest Mother.

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In interpreting the Holy Scripture it is often difficult to determine whether the direct reference, especially in the Old Testament, is to the Mother or to the Church of Christ. Our Lady and the Church merge in the sacred writings into a mystical unity. As early as the second century St. Clement of Alexandria wrote with reference to our Lady, "One only Mother Virgin! Dear it is to me to call her the Church." Mary represented the Christian Church before it existed in itself. She was not only the Mother of the Incarnate Son of God, but also the faithful worshiper of His divinity from the first moment of the Incarnation. We saw on Holy Saturday how Mary's faith stood the test of Calvary, and how her unfaltering faith kept alive on earth the light never to be extinguished which would be confided to the Church. Our Lady also represented and personified the Church in her obedience: "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word*"; in her prayer, as at Cana: "*They have no wine*"; in her submission to Christ, "*Do whatever he tells you*"; and in her faithfulness to our Savior to the end. Mary was in her single person what the Church collectively has been from the day of its establishment.

As Jesus wills, since His ascension into heaven, to permit the co-operation of the Church in all that He does for the elect, so, during His mortal life, Mary shared in all that the Savior did for our salvation. She, whose formal consent had been required before the Eternal Word took flesh in her womb, was present at the foot of the cross, so that she as a creature might offer Him who offered Himself as God,

our Redeemer. The Mother's sacrifice was united with that of the Son, and Mary was thereby raised to a degree of merit which the human mind is entirely unable to comprehend.

On the day of Pentecost the maternity of the Church would be proclaimed to the world. Mary was invested with the office of Mother of mankind when Jesus hung upon the cross. Soon we shall contemplate her in the Cenacle where she will be enriched with new gifts in view of her mission in the early Church; and ever since her Assumption our heavenly Mother has continued to assist our earthly Mother the Church. She continues to exercise her maternal power and love on behalf of the entire Communion of Saints. "His Mother is the whole Church," said St. Augustine, "because, through the grace of God, everywhere she gives birth to the faithful of Christ." Mary, by her all-powerful intercession, procures for us the grace of supernatural birth and growth, and the Church makes accessible to us the channels of these divine gifts, namely, the sacraments and the word of God. If we shall rejoice in heaven at seeing the glories of the Church triumphant, who could describe the joy we shall have in beholding the splendor and majesty of the Mother who bore us in Christ?

"Rejoice, O spotless Mother, in that thou didst conceive of the Holy Ghost and bring forth thy Child as the star emits its rays. Grant us fruitfulness also in the works of salvation. Take these barren hearts of ours and by thy merciful prayers make them fertile" (from an ancient German Sequence).

## *The Repentant Thomas*



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“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Bring here thy finger and see my hands; and bring here thy hand and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (Jn. 20:27, 28)

Witness in spirit this apparition of Jesus to the incredulous Thomas.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of growing daily in supernatural faith.

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Faith in the divinity of Jesus is the first requirement for sharing in the dīvine life. This faith comprises all other revealed truths. The leading instruction in the Gospel for the octave day of Easter is the lesson in faith taught by Jesus to the Apostle Thomas and through him to us all. Jesus said to Thomas, “*Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.*” It might seem to us that the attitude of Thomas was that of a circumspect and prudent man, one who was slow to believe a report. There would appear to be no great fault in his insistence upon experimental evidence before accepting so great a miracle as the Resurrection; but let us reflect upon the grave, even though merciful, remonstrance of Jesus. Stubbornness and incredulity in matters of faith are deserving of punishment; even though Jesus had so far condescended to the weakness of His disciple as to accept the condition upon which alone he declared he would

believe, even though Thomas now stood trembling with awe and love before his risen Master, Jesus rebuked him for his reluctant faith.

Thomas had heard the predictions of the passion and of His resurrection from the dead from the lips of Jesus Himself; he had heard the testimony of Mary Magdalene, of Peter, and of the other Apostles and disciples; but Thomas had to see for himself. How like him we are! To the motives we already possess for belief in the provident care of God for us and for all men, we sometimes wish God to add others, even miracles worked especially for us. Again, like Thomas, we are in danger of offending God unless our faith possesses that certain expansiveness which makes us view all things in a supernatural light, thus preparing us more and more to receive the precious fruit of supernatural faith—an abundance of interior light and joy.

But let us learn also from the repentant Thomas how to exercise our faith. Through the most gracious and merciful condescension of Jesus, Thomas was brought to realize the sinfulness of his unbelief, and he cried out with the ardor of living faith, "*My Lord and my God!*" Thus, he addressed Jesus not only as his Lord and Master who had chosen him to be one of the Twelve; this would not have been a true act of faith, since that which can be seen and touched does not require the exercise of faith. But from what was now visible to him his soul rose, generous and repentant, to the invisible and the divine; and he acknowledged Jesus also as his God. By this profession of faith Thomas more than compensated for his former unbelief; he even surpassed by it the rest of the Apostles, who at this time were more taken up with the visible glory than with the invisible divinity of their risen Lord.

“O Son begotten of the unbegotten Father! . . . we . . . beseech Thee to grant that the faith whereby we believe may present us before Thee after this life, free from sin. May neither sloth engender, nor indiscreet prying foster any misgiving of doubt or error concerning Thee. Preserve in Thy name those whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy precious blood. Let our souls contemplate Thee and vouchsafe to enter our hearts. O Thou who . . . appeared in the midst of Thy disciples and greeted them with peace, abide ever with us. Thou who breathed upon them the Spirit of Life, grant us the consolation of the same Holy Spirit” (from a prayer of the Gothic liturgy).

APRIL 20

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### *The Glorified Wounds of Jesus*



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“What are these wounds in the midst of my hands?” (Zach. 13:6.) These words of the prophet Zacharias are applied in an accommodated sense to Christ in the liturgy of the Church.

O divine Savior, may the memory of Your sacred wounds impress deeply upon my heart sorrow for my sins and confidence in Your mercy.

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The glorified body of our risen Lord bears the marks of the wounds made by the nails and the lance. They are as visible and deep as when He was first taken down from the cross. “*Bring here thy finger . . .*,” said Jesus, holding out His hands to Thomas, “*and bring here thy hand and put it into my side.*” The incredulity of this Apostle was thus made the occasion of another incontestable proof of the

Resurrection. It is this incident also which assures us that when our Savior rose from the dead He bore still in His body the stigmata of the crucifixion. And what He was at the moment of the Resurrection, this He is forever. For all eternity He will retain the sacred wounds. They are an everlasting memorial of His victory over death; and so great a glory streams from them that heaven itself is dazzled by it. According to certain Fathers of the Church, the martyrs who have followed Christ and have been, like Him, victorious over death, will also shine eternally with a special brightness in those parts of their bodies which have suffered torture in imitation of Christ and for love of Him.

Furthermore, it is by ever showing to the Father His sacred wounds that Jesus, our Mediator, averts from us the thunderbolts of divine Justice and causes mercy to triumph over judgment. O precious Wounds, the handiwork of our sins, but now the ground of our hope! With the angels of heaven I adore you shining in glory and perpetually interceding for us with the Father. The day will come when the sacred stigmata will be shown again to mankind, and many will look upon them with fear; *they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced*, said Zacharias in prophecy. For the wicked those wounds of Jesus will dart forth the lightnings of angry justice, but for those who have spent the Easters of their earthly pilgrimage rising to a holy life, they will be a source of mercy and gladness on that dread day. "Where can I who am weak find security and rest," exclaimed St. Bernard, "if not in the wounds of Jesus. The greater His power to save, the more secure am I in my dwelling there. . . . The secret of His heart is laid bare in the wounds of His body; the great mystery of mercy is revealed. . . . What could show me more clearly than Thy wounds, O Lord,

that *thou art good and kind, full of mercy for all that call upon thee?*"

"O God, who, by the passion of Thy only-begotten Son and by the shedding of His precious blood through His five wounds, restored human nature when it was lost by sin, grant us, we beseech Thee, that we who venerate on earth the wounds suffered by Him may be found worthy to obtain in heaven the fruits of that same Precious Blood" (Roman Missal).

APRIL 21

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## *The Peace of Christ*



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"Peace be to you!" (Jn. 20:19.)

In spirit enter with Jesus the room where the disciples were gathered behind closed doors *for fear of the Jews*.

My risen Savior, grant me the grace of an abiding interior peace.

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*Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, "Peace be to you!"* These words of Jesus do not represent merely the salutation customary among the Jews. The greeting He here extends to His own signifies that peace which He Himself won for them by His bitter passion and death. It is the very precious grace which makes the soul despise the pleasures of the world and of sense and which raises it above the sadness and discouragement that come from self-love. This peace establishes the soul in tranquillity by preserving it from that overeagerness and those preoccupations which lead to trouble and disquietude. Unless we possess in our souls this peace of Christ, we cannot pray efficaciously

for divine lights and favors, or hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts cannot at one and the same time contain the things of earth and those of heaven.

If we do not check the irregular movements of the soul at their very beginning, we shall discover within our minds and hearts at the time of prayer only the agitation which will have entered there beforehand. It may be merely a plan which we have formed and which we have an impatient eagerness to execute without delay. It may be an occupation to which we have given ourselves with too much natural enthusiasm, or a humiliation which we believe we have received, or a feeling of irritation and discontent. It may even be the anticipation of innocent recreation which we desire too intensely and which we shall enter upon with too great an outpouring of the heart. When we are disturbed within, our prayer, far from being able to *pierce the clouds* and draw down heavenly blessings, only adds to our guilt because of the impatience and reluctance with which we pray.

A gentle solicitude for preserving interior peace is necessary, then, if we are to compose ourselves for prayer and attend to the Lord's voice. Ordinarily, it is to recollected souls that Jesus deigns to speak. External solitude also is conducive to peace, interior calm, and recollection. Our divine Master teaches us this when He tells us that if we would converse with our heavenly Father, we should enter our chamber, close the door, and pray there in secret. But she who has learned to live in interior solitude will hear the voice of her Spouse even in the midst of absorbing external occupations; for she will have in the depths of her soul that peace of Christ which the world can neither give nor take away. On the other hand, one who habitually gives full sway to troubled and distracted thoughts will not enjoy



this happiness even when she is alone, even before the altar itself. If you seldom hear Jesus speaking to you in prayer, if your spiritual exercises hold no attraction for you, perhaps it is because you have allowed yourself to become preoccupied with various earthly desires and projects. Unless you do violence to yourself you cannot maintain recollection. Persistent effort is needed to control the imagination, to mortify the senses, and to rise above yourself.

O good Jesus, grant me a constant increase of that interior peace which is so necessary for me if I am to profit by Your grace. Help me to avoid with prudence the occasions of unnecessary distraction. Enable me, O Jesus, to resist firmly the temptations that present themselves during prayer and to apply myself steadily and with a good will to the work of self-conquest.

APRIL 22

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### *Ways to Interior Peace*



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“Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11:29).  
Hear our divine Savior addressing these words to you.

O Jesus, infuse into my soul those virtues which will put me in possession of Your peace.

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Jesus showed us the way to true peace when He said, “*Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls.*” We shall find peace, then, if, putting this divine lesson into practice, we stifle at its source our natural desire for the esteem of others. Once we are liberated from our anxiety over human judgments, we

shall remain untroubled and calm, despite the varied and shifting opinions of those about us. We shall be concerned only with that which God sees in us and with His judgment of our actions. Only let us be humble, truly humble, and we shall have peace in our souls and rest and joy. Whence come, for the most part, the little pains that disturb our interior calm? Is it not from self-love, which exaggerates the good that is in us and the evil that is in others, which makes us unduly sensitive to slight injuries and humiliations? Is it not wounded pride that most often keeps us from responding to our Savior's loving invitation?

Another means of acquiring or increasing interior peace is the singlehearted love of God. It may be said that herein all is comprised, for he who loves fulfills the whole law. We are made to love and to be loved; we must have a friend, but our best and dearest friend can only be Jesus. Jesus knows we have need of Him and that we cannot be happy without Him; and so He has neglected nothing that might serve to win our love. No means of proving His love for us was too painful, too abject and humiliating for Him, if only He might attract our love in return. And for all that He has done for us He asks only that we come to Him freely, as children to their father. He begs us, as it were, to allow Him to soothe our pains, to sweeten the bitterness of life, and give us the rest which we shall vainly seek elsewhere. Let us go to Him, then, and like St. John the Beloved and innumerable holy souls find in His Heart our treasures of peace and consolation.

A third aid toward peace of soul is obedience joined with prayer; obedience, first of all, to the Rule. "Apply yourself, my son, to do rather the will of another than your own and you will arrive at true peace," says the *Imitation of*

*Christ.* What a source of interior consolation it would be for you if you could truly say of yourself, "I love my God as I am loved by Him. I do always that which He desires of me." Insofar as you are faithful to your Rule you can say this with confidence and without fear of self-deception, for to love His will is to love God. The Rule is for you the expression of His will. To the obedience of a well-disciplined life let us add our supplications that interior peace be granted us, uniting our intention with that of the Church who prays repeatedly for this grace in her liturgy: "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace"; "Grant, O Lord, to thy servants that peace which the world cannot give."

"O God, the giver of peace and the lover of charity, grant unto Thy servants a perfect union with Thy will, that we may be delivered from all temptations that beset us" (Roman Missal).

APRIL 23

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## *The Sacrament of Penance*



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"He breathed upon them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained' " (Jn. 20:23).

On the evening of Easter day our Savior bestowed upon the Apostles an essential power of the priesthood: the forgiveness of sins. He breathed upon them the immortal breath that is the Holy Spirit to show in an external manner that the Holy Spirit is the Principle and the Dispenser of all authority in the Church.

Divine Savior, help me to receive the Sacrament of Penance more fruitfully.

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We who are obliged by Rule to go to confession frequently and who faithfully keep this Rule are well aware of its importance. But it is profitable for us to reflect occasionally upon the benefits of frequent confession, so that we may make better use of our opportunity. One of the most efficacious means of avoiding sin and of advancing solidly and rapidly in virtue is to have recourse often and fruitfully to the Sacrament of Penance. The oftener the soul reflects upon itself in a serious examination of conscience, the more clear-sighted it becomes in detecting its faults and the more eager to blot them out by penance.

The Sacrament of Penance, frequently and well received, also imparts a constant renewal of fervor. A flame grows dim unless it is tended and piety, however ardent, will lose its warmth unless it is fed and developed. Nothing serves so well to keep our souls in good condition as the constant rekindling and stirring up of our fervor that result from frequent and good confession. The oftener we approach this sacrament the more we shall receive of its grace; and it is the holy movements of grace that animate fervor. The oftener we go to confession worthily, the more will our minds be filled with good thoughts and our wills with lively affections; and such thoughts and affections are the proper fuel for the fire of piety. We do not leave the confessional without carrying away a certain unction that seeps into our hearts and fills us with an interior and heavenly gladness. After a good confession we feel interiorly recollected and joyful, our spiritual pace is quickened by a new ardor, we run along the path of perfection.

Yet, there is danger in frequent confession of the spirit of routine. The members of a religious community are protected by many safeguards, by the vigilance of their Superiors, and the prescriptions of their Rule; therefore, when confession is frequent, the matter should ordinarily be light. There is, consequently, a tendency to confess without contrition or without a firm purpose of amendment, and so without utility for the soul. We must take great care with regard to this matter, so that we may not leave the confessional more guilty in the sight of God than when we entered it. The sins we confess may be venial, but we are strictly obliged to have sincere repentance for at least one sin confessed and to form a strong resolution of avoiding it for the future. To make sure of the proper contrition it is well to add some past sin for which we are truly sorry. Another means of checking the fatal spirit of routine is to make known to our confessor in addition to our daily falls the actual state of our dispositions, the efforts we are making, the good or bad will we feel within us. If we would ask ourselves seriously before confession, "What is my real state in the eyes of God?"; if we really gave an account to ourselves and to God, then we should find in this great sacrament the mercy and peace which our Savior intended us to find therein.

O Lord, You have promised us the forgiveness of our sins if we sincerely do penance for them. Grant me, if You so will, the light to know the sins I have committed, humility to accuse myself strictly of them, love to feel contrition for them, and grace to avoid them in the future.

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*Apparition of Jesus at Lake Tiberias*

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“After these things Jesus manifested himself again at the sea of Tiberias. . . . He said to them: ‘Cast the net to the right of the boat’” (Jn. 21:1, 6).

This is the first time our Savior appeared in Galilee and the third time that He showed Himself to several Apostles together.

Lord Jesus, instill into me a loyal and active love of the Church and enable me to inspire it in others.

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The second occurrence of the miraculous catch of fish contains several new and consoling features. The number of fish appears to have been greater than the first time, yet the net does not break. The Church, we are to infer, can extend without danger her conquest of souls through the apostolic ministry. Also, instead of withdrawing as before in sentiments of reverential fear, Peter, hearing from John that it was indeed the Lord who waited on the shore, now cast himself into the sea in order to reach Him the sooner. The intimate repast shared by our Savior with His Apostles on the shore prefigures the recompense reserved for the apostolic ministry in eternity. Here, as in eternity, weariness, the labors of the night, are succeeded by repose in a secure haven. Here, as in eternity, the Savior is the center and source of joy. He associates with His own, He Himself participates in their gladness. All are ravished by His goodness, all recognize Him and *none of those reclining dared ask him, “Who art thou?” knowing that it was the Lord.*

But this new apparition of the Savior was granted par-

ticularly in Peter's favor. Up to now the primacy had been simply announced to him. Now the Savior conferred it formally in the presence of several other Apostles. In all its plenitude and majesty He bestowed upon Peter a dignity which belonged to him exclusively, a mission truly divine in origin and nature, whereby Peter was to represent Jesus Himself. "*Feed my lambs,*" He said to him. His mission was divine also in extent. All the sheep of the Good Shepherd, His whole flock, were committed to Peter's care. The condition upon which the primacy was conferred upon Peter was also laid down. This condition was love, for only by a great and humble love can the care of souls be exercised in a Christian manner.

The mission of the Apostles was to be exposed to every sort of contradiction and persecution, since it was amid such trials that our Savior had accomplished the work entrusted to Him. Before His death He had warned them that He was sending them *as lambs among wolves*, that they would be *hated by all* for His name's sake, for "*no disciple is above his teacher, nor is the servant above his master.*" "Oh, how much love is necessary never to be discouraged and always to bear patiently the crosses of this state of life," wrote François de Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, to a friend who was to be elevated to the episcopate. "It is easy enough for those shepherds who only take care of the flock for the sake of the milk and the wool, but it is terrible for those who devote themselves entirely to the salvation of souls."

How shall I worthily thank You, O God, my Savior, for allowing me to be a member of Your Church from the time of my entrance into this world! It is by her and in her alone that I am able to live the supernatural life. Continue Your mercies toward me, O my God, and grant me to remain a loyal

daughter of the Church until death. Show also Your goodness and merciful condescension to those souls who have come to know the true faith, but whose entrance into the Church will require painful sacrifices. Strengthen them and give them courage. Make Your Bride, O divine Master, that which You have said she is to be, *the joyful mother of children*.

APRIL 25

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### *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*



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“I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28).

These words of the prophet Joel foretell the coming of the Holy Spirit.

O Holy Spirit, Father of the poor, grant me your consolations.

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The reign of the Holy Spirit on earth was to begin only when the God-Man should be enthroned at the right hand of the Father; yet we must not conclude from this that the Paraclete had been inactive with regard to mankind until then. Holy Scripture itself, from which the sacred liturgy draws the sublime instruction it imparts to us, is composed of the words of Him who *spoke by the prophets*. And as through His operation we have the word of God in Scripture, so also through Him the Word was made flesh. Again, it was the Spirit of the Father and the Son who rested upon the sacred humanity of Jesus, enriching the Child of Mary with gifts incomparably greater than those even which she, the Mother, had received from Him; yet the treasures of grace bestowed upon her seem to border upon infinity.



Furthermore, on the day of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Spirit hovered visibly in the form of a dove over the well-beloved Son of the Father; but, as the Evangelist St. John tells us, *as yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

And so the great mystery of the Ascension stands between the two divine reigns on earth: that of the Son of God and that of the Paraclete. Jesus Himself heralded the approaching reign of the Holy Spirit when He said, *"It is expedient for you that I depart. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you."* And that we might form some idea of the great majesty of our new Sovereign, Jesus spoke of the awful chastisements which were to befall those who offended Him: *"Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come."*

We should, therefore, await the advent of the Spirit of Love who is to *renew the face of the earth* with the same growing expectation and longing with which we looked for the birth of the Savior as the season of Advent was nearing its close. The Word and the Holy Spirit of God are coequal in glory and power and their coming to the earth proceeds from one and the same eternal and merciful decree of the Most Blessed Trinity. It is by the operation of both the Word and the Spirit that we are made *partakers of the divine nature*. Let us not be content with merely acknowledging the existence of the Holy Spirit, but let us try to live in the realization that He acts for us and in us. Daily we should offer Him our gratitude for His gifts of grace—gifts of which we may not even be aware—and we should beg Him to continue His sanctifying work in our souls.

“O divine Paraclete, who proceedest equally from the Father and the Son, with Thy glowing fire, give eloquence to our tongues and make our hearts burn with love of Thee. . . . O Thou who heretofore didst visit, teach, and strengthen the timid disciples, deign to visit us; vouchsafe to console us and the faithful throughout the world” (from a Sequence composed by Adam of St. Victor).

APRIL 26

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*Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 808)

APRIL 27

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*Self-Renunciation*



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“But because I have spoken to you these things, sadness has filled your heart” (Jn. 16:6).

In the view of the Apostles the coming and testimony of the Paraclete did not compensate for the absence of their beloved Master.

O Jesus, let me be moved to sadness only when, through my fault, I have lost the sense of Your presence.

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When the Apostles heard their divine Master say that He was about to leave them, they at once became sad. Unable

as yet to think supernaturally they could not understand that the departure of Jesus would be for them a source of good. The loss of His consoling physical presence was to mean for them the great gain of the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. The attachment of the Apostles to the person of their Master, although good in itself, was an overly natural affection which would constitute an impediment to the coming of the Holy Spirit. How much greater hindrance to us are those far less praiseworthy and far more inordinate inclinations which keep our hearts bound to creatures, and especially to our own will! For we who are supposed to renounce all must, as a spiritual writer has said, include ourselves among the things to be given up. Let us often reflect upon the words of Jesus: "*If anyone wishes*" — to be a heroic soul? a religious? — no, but "*to come after me,*" that is, simply "to be a follower of mine," "*let him deny himself.*"

To the example of our Savior who, as St. Paul says, *did not please himself* may be added the practice of the Apostles after they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Then Peter was no longer presumptuous, Thomas no longer self-opinionated, and John, the Apostle of fraternal love, no longer asked that fire might fall from heaven upon those who would not receive him. The later annals of the Church show us many others who were raised from the life of nature to the life of grace by the practice of self-abnegation: a St. Francis de Sales who, although naturally prone to quick anger and impatience, became a model of meekness; a St. Ignatius, who conquered his impetuosity of temperament by a most rigorous corporal mortification; a St. Francis Xavier, who overcame his inordinate family pride by the practice of abject humility.

We sometimes wonder and with reason why the many

religious in the world produce so little fruit, relatively to their numbers, in the work of the salvation of souls. The key to the mystery is in the words of our Lord: "*Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit.*" We are not dead to the world and to ourselves, and therefore we do not bring forth fruit proportionate to our numbers. So much depends upon the difficult but necessary virtue of self-renunciation: our personal sanctity, the success of our works, peace and concord, the union of hearts, wisdom in the exercise of zeal, the glory of the Church.

Lord Jesus, I have given all to You, all that I am and all that I have. Detach me in reality, I beseech You, from all that is created and especially from whatever flatters my pride, my self-will, and my sensuality. How often, good Jesus, do not self-interest, natural motives, the gratification of self-love replace Your pure love within me! Through the intercession of my guardian angel, I ask the grace of instantly making an act of divine love whenever my heart inclines toward self or other creatures.

APRIL 28

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### *The Spirit of Truth*



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"But I speak the truth to you; it is expedient for you that I depart. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn. 16:7).

On the eve of His death, Jesus promised the Apostles that He would send them the Holy Spirit.

O Holy Spirit of God, increase my knowledge and love of You.

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*"It is expedient for you that I depart."* How could it have been good or useful for the Apostles that Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, should leave them? Yet He says formally at a most solemn moment, *"I speak the truth to you; it is expedient for you that I depart."* After Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, had completed the work of the Redemption, the task would still remain of sanctifying mankind and transforming their souls by new gifts which would enable them to comprehend supernatural truths. The Apostles had understood the teachings of Jesus very imperfectly. Even after the Resurrection they would still be quite incapable of accomplishing their mission. And so now, before His death, Jesus foretold the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of their transformation into new men who would change the face of the earth.

It was a divine Person, absolutely equal to Himself, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who would now carry on the Savior's work. He would be to the Apostles with reference to their mission what Jesus had been to them in their formation as depositories of the faith. They were not as yet placed in full possession of the treasures of the faith. This the Holy Spirit was to accomplish by bringing to their minds all that Jesus had taught them and by teaching them all things; that is, by imparting a most intimate knowledge and understanding of the truths of faith. The Holy Spirit was even to add to the truths which Jesus had committed to the Apostles; for our Savior said, *"Many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will teach you all the truth."* The Holy Spirit, that is to say, besides deepening their understanding of the truths of faith, would complete the revelation in the Apostles and

through the Apostles. All the enlightenment given to the Councils and transmitted through the teachings and writings of the Doctors of the Church are the result of this promise of the Savior that the Holy Spirit would come to the Apostles.

This Holy Spirit, this Guide, Consoler, and Dispenser of all gifts, was not only to be with the Apostles, but also in them by the marvelous effects that He would produce in them personally and in their ministry: "*He will dwell with you, and be in you.*" Were not the peace that Jesus gave to His Apostles and left with them and that joy which no one could take away, in reality, the Holy Spirit Himself? For the Holy Spirit is Love; peace and joy, besides being His special gifts, are the effects of love. Soon we shall be commemorating the accomplishment of this marvelous work of the Holy Spirit in the Apostles. Let us prepare ourselves for this anniversary by asking the grace to realize our need of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, especially in understanding and practicing the teachings of Jesus.

"O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant to Thy people to love that which Thou commandest and desire that which Thou dost promise; that so, among the changing things of this world, our hearts may be set where true joys are to be found" (Roman Missal).

APRIL 29

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## *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*



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"The Spirit of truth . . . will dwell with you, and be in you"  
(Jn. 14:17).

By these words Jesus promised His Apostles the indwelling as well as the guidance of the Paraclete.

O Holy Spirit, teach me to grow in the interior life by increasing my union with You present within my soul.

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*"If anyone love me,"* our Savior said further in His farewell discourse to the Apostles, *"he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."* This mystery along with the others would be incomprehensible to the Apostles until Pentecost when they would be enlightened interiorly by the Paraclete Himself. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit and, conjointly with Him, of the other two Persons of the Trinity in a soul justified by grace, is a most marvelous divine benefaction. That the Holy Spirit was to be the gift of both the Father and the Son was formally asserted by our Savior: *"And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate";* again, *"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name."* This divine Spirit both comes to us and abides in us. Grace is not given us by itself; it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit, the Author of grace. The Giver comes with His gifts. And when we have received Him, He dwells with us as the protector and guardian of our souls, the cause and source of our supernatural life, and the pledge that we shall one day possess God in the Beatific Vision.

The infinite God is, of course, present to every creature by His essence and by His power; all creation is filled with Him. *In him,* said St. Paul to the Athenians, *we live and move and have our being.* Even if we had not been elevated to the supernatural order, God would be present to us as preserving our existence and concurring in the operation of

our faculties; but to a soul hallowed by grace, God is not only present, He dwells within it. The name, Theophorus, that is, "God-bearer," so dear to the early Christians, is our true name; and such evidences of honor as the incensing which the sacred liturgy accords the faithful on certain occasions is only their due. It is God whom we bear within us who is incensed. Nor should we marvel that God has given us an angel as an escort, since we are temples of the Most Holy Trinity. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit implies a God present by love and accomplishing the work of sanctification in a soul that is habitually submissive to Him. Even as regards the souls of the just, He does not dwell in all in the same manner. If some souls are further advanced toward perfection than others, it is because they have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them more fully and directing them more completely than others.

O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore You and thank You for Your unspeakable gift in becoming the Guest of my soul. Teach me how to live in union with You, how to keep my soul quietly mindful of Your presence and always attentive to Your direction. Let me not degrade Your presence in my soul by frivolous, vain, or uncharitable thoughts, or show disrespect for Your presence in the souls of others by haughty and unkind words or actions.

APRIL 30

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### *Sanctifying Grace*



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"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" (Lk. 1:35).



In the words, *the power of the Most High*, the archangel Gabriel refers to the operation of the Holy Spirit of God whereby the Word would be made flesh. Man's elevation to a participation in the divine life through the life of grace is also the work of the Paraclete.

Divine Paraclete, give me a deeper understanding of the greatness of Your benefits to my soul.

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When the archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that with her consent she would become the Mother of the Savior, our Lady rightly asked, "*How shall this happen?*" Gabriel replied, "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee*"; that is, the mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished by the direct action of Divinity. But to elevate man, a creature, to the dignity of a child of God, participating in the divine life and destined to enjoy the happiness of seeing God is quite as impossible, naturally speaking, as was the Incarnation of the Word; and it is again the Holy Spirit who effects this marvel through sanctifying grace. He it was who imparted the life of grace to the first man, but Adam forfeited it, not only for himself, but also for his descendants. It required the incarnation and death of the Son of God to render us capable of receiving again this divine life. The divine filiation produced by the state of grace makes us capable of divine acts, acts impossible for unaided nature; such as, to know God and to love Him, imperfectly here below, it is true, but perfectly in heaven. Grace is the seed of glory; our divinization is on this earth only in its first stage. An heir while he is still a child has not the power of disposing of his property, he merely enjoys its ownership. Similarly, we shall perform perfectly only in heaven those

acts for which we now possess the power; *it has not yet appeared what we shall be*, writes St. John.

It is no less true, however, that even in this life grace elevates the essence of the soul to the point of making it a Godlike being, capable of divine operations. This commencement of the divine life in the soul through sanctifying grace is the first benefit we receive from the Holy Spirit. The grandeur of a soul in the state of grace is completely beyond our powers of conception. Were we ever to behold the beauty of such a soul we should believe that we were seeing God. And the Holy Spirit continues to foster this divine life infused by Him until He has brought it to its full flowering in the life of glory. All supernatural grace is due to the merits of Jesus Christ, but it is infused by the Holy Spirit; and so we say the Father created us, the Son redeemed us, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. We should not, then, adore Him as if from afar. He is a most intimate Benefactor. At this moment, if there is no obstacle on our part, He is filling our souls with His presence. In the measure that each of our actions is supernaturally performed He increases the sanctifying grace which He first gave to us through Baptism. He is incessantly occupied with our good, preventing and assisting us with actual grace and giving to the sacraments their efficacy. Yet, perhaps we seldom think of His action within our soul; perhaps we are even working against it.

“Holy Spirit, come into my heart; draw it to Thee by Thy power, O my God, and grant me charity with filial fear. Preserve me, O ineffable Love, from every evil thought; warm me, inflame me with Thy dear love, and every pain will seem light to me. My Father, my sweet Lord, help me in all my actions” (prayer of St. Catherine of Siena).

*Magnificat*



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“My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk. 1:46).

“Let Mary play upon the instruments,” says St. Augustine in introducing the *Magnificat*, “and let the timbrels resound between the active fingers of the young mother. Let the choirs sing together joyfully and let their sweet songs be mingled with alternating strains. Hear then how our timbrel-player sang; for she says, ‘*Magnificat!*’”

O Mary, teach me how to thank God worthily for His blessings, and unite my prayers of praise and gratitude to yours.

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Mary, reflecting upon the infinite mercy of the Most High toward her, was filled with gratitude, and with the desire to “magnify” her Benefactor to the full extent of her powers. But in what sense can a creature magnify God? It is clearly impossible to increase the greatness of One whose grandeur and magnificence are limitless and incomprehensibly sublime. Even God could not magnify Himself in the sense of making Himself any greater than He already is. Yet, although human praise can add nothing to God, we can increase His greatness in ourselves by manifesting His image in our souls through the practice of virtue and good works. “Whenever I magnify my soul by work, thought, or speech,” says Origen, “then the image of the great God is produced, and the Lord Himself, whose image I am, is magnified in my soul.”

This homage which all creatures owe to God can be practiced in our thoughts by interior acts of adoration and by the esteem we show for all God’s creatures for His sake;

it can be expressed in our words, when we speak with profoundest reverence of God and all that pertains to Him; and in our actions, when we do everything solely for the glory of God, especially when we practice the virtue of humility. The Holy Spirit says, *The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God; for great is the power of God alone, and he is honored by the humble.* Finally, we can “magnify” God by our submission, that is, by willingly bearing the crosses He sends us for love of Him.

Mary used the words “*My soul*” in offering her homage to the Most High, to show that she praised God with her whole strength, with all her faculties of body and soul, all her interior and exterior powers. Moreover, she was speaking not only of her own individual soul, but also of that of the divine Infant she was carrying in her womb; for His soul was so closely united to hers as to form with it, in a certain sense, but one single soul. Furthermore, since by the Incarnation she had conceived also the Mystical Body of the Incarnate Word, she may be said to have included in her canticle of praise all souls created to the image and likeness of God, who were then or ever had been or ever would be in the world. Mary magnified the Lord also for us, praising and exalting Him in our name for taking flesh in her virginal womb, that He might accomplish the great work of our Redemption. And when we ourselves recite the *Magnificat* we should bear in mind that we also may draw upon a higher and more exalted praise than our own; for if, as St. Paul says, the Father grants us all things in giving us His divine Son, we may offer as our own the praise and adoration of Jesus and His holy Mother and also that of all His Mystical Body.

O Virgin Mary, from the first moment of your life until the last you magnified the Lord most perfectly with all the powers of your being, with all your thoughts, affections, words, and actions. Obtain for me the grace to love and to prefer in all things the holy will of God, His interests and His glory, to my own will and my own interests and satisfaction.

MAY 2

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### *The Joy of Mary*



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“And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk. 1:47).

By these words Mary shows that the *Magnificat* is really a hymn to the glory of the Redemption.

O Mary, help me to seek all my joys where you found yours.

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Mary rejoiced in God her Savior, because, coming into the world first and foremost to save and redeem her, He had preserved her from original sin and overwhelmed her with His grace to such an extent, says St. Thomas Aquinas, that “it overflowed from her soul upon her body and in such marvelous measure that she conceived in her body the Son of God.” Mary’s joy was so great at the moment of the Incarnation that several of the Fathers have said that she was then filled with the inconceivable joys that are possessed by the blessed in heaven. “O blessed Mary,” exclaimed Abbot Rupert, “it was then that a deluge of joy, a furnace of love, and a torrent of heavenly delights burst upon thee, wholly absorbed and inebriated thee, and made thee experience what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever understood.”

Mary always placed her joy in God. How mistaken we are if we fear the renunciation and self-denial that are necessary for us if we wish to *taste and see how good the Lord is!* For the hearts of those who seek their happiness in striving for the perfect love of God and the perfect forgetfulness of self are a paradise of joy and peace. *Tribulation and anguish shall be visited upon the soul of every man who works evil*, says St. Paul; *but glory and honor and peace shall be awarded to everyone who does good*. And he said of himself, *I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our troubles*. "Holy Mary" is the first invocation of the Litany of Loreto and "Queen of Peace" is the last. The two invocations are in reality the same. Mary is Queen of peace as she is the joyful Cause of our joy, because she is pre-eminent in holiness. Of all the children of men Mary alone was never at war with God, for by her Immaculate Conception she was preserved from the only thing that can rob the soul of peace and joy, namely, sin.

Again, Mary's profound humility enabled her to endure suffering and humiliation without the least disturbance of her essential joy and peace of soul. Also, since her will was ever totally united to the will of God she ever possessed God's peace and joy in an eminent degree. Finally, her inconceivable charity toward mankind preserved her from all feelings of enmity, the destroyer of peace, even toward those who crucified her divine Son. Who would not be inspired to love our all-good and all-gracious Virgin Mother who has such deep love for us! And if we love her we shall imitate her. "Whoever loves this immaculate Virgin is chaste," says a holy Carthusian monk. "Whoever honors her is devout; whoever imitates her is holy. No one loves her without feeling the effects of reciprocal love. Not one of those who love her

can perish; not one of those who try to imitate her can fail to attain eternal salvation.”

Sweet Virgin Mary, implant in my heart a detachment from all the things of earth like that which characterized your virginal heart. Obtain for me from your divine Son the grace to seek all my joy and peace in loving and glorifying Him and in honoring and imitating you with all my heart and soul and strength.

MAY 3

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*The Finding of the Holy Cross*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 810)

MAY 4

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*Prayer in Jesus' Name*



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“Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you” (Jn. 16:23).

Jesus here teaches the disciples the necessary conditions for prayer: we must ask the Father in His name.

O Jesus, grant me the proper dispositions to receive graces of prayer according to Your Will.

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St. Augustine, in commenting upon these words of Jesus, remarks that it is not merely the pronouncing of the holy

name of Jesus that gives our prayers their efficacy, but that which is rightly and truly to be understood by the utterance of this sacred name. The name of Jesus represents His Person and epitomizes His mission. To pray in His name means to pray in the most intimate union with Him by faith and charity, in accordance with His interests, by virtue of His merits, and with His spirit. He Himself has given us excellent motives for this prayer in His name. *"Whatever you ask in my name,"* He said, *"that I will do, in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* So to pray, therefore, is to make an act of faith in Jesus and to give glory to God. It is also evidence of our love for Him: *"If you abide in me, and if my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you."* It is essential for the apostolic ministry: *"I . . . have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you."* It was to be for the Apostles and for us a means of converse with Him after His "departure": *"Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive."* Prayer in Christ's name, therefore, is an act of union with Him in faith, in charity, and in works.

We no longer enjoy the visible presence of our Savior, but He has given us prayer in compensation. What He did for His Apostles during His corporal life on earth, He still does for us through prayer. By prayer we are protected, consoled, instructed, and cared for in soul and body. The reason that the Apostles had *hitherto* not asked anything in the name of Jesus was that He Himself had been with them. What an inspiring motive for prayer is the thought that it takes the place of the visible presence of Jesus! It can compensate for the divine, immeasurable power



of His very presence! So efficacious, indeed, is prayer that is offered in the name of Jesus that the support of our Savior's own intercession needs not to be added: "*In that day you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.*" By faith in Jesus, by love for Him, by union with His intentions and merits, the prayer of the Apostles and our prayer become in some sense His own. If the significance of the holy name of Jesus were really understood, who would dare to utter it carelessly! It is because we do not attend to what we are saying that we so often pray without the proper confidence and therefore without efficacy.

*All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O Lord, and glorify your name. For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds; you alone are God. Teach me, O Lord, your way that I may walk in your truth; direct my heart that it may fear your name. I will give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forever (Ps. 85:9-12).*

MAY 5

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## *Necessity of Prayer*



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"Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk. 11:1).

In spirit join the disciples as they beg our Lord to instruct them in the manner in which they should pray.

Lord Jesus, grant me to be faithful to the degree of prayer that You will to bestow upon me.

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The example of our Lord, His frequent counsels, the lives of the saints, as well as our own personal needs and those of our community and the whole Church present to us most compelling motives for the practice of prayer, both vocal and mental. In the Gospel we find the Savior of the world ever at prayer: in the temple, in the desert, in the mountains. Even His most bitter agony on the night of His betrayal only intensified His prayer. In the opinion of some of the Doctors of the Church, He taught us also the exercise of mental prayer by His example, for He practiced uninterrupted contemplation, and by formal precept in the words recorded by St. Matthew: "*But when thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing thy door, pray to thy Father in secret.*" Contemplation is not a matter of time or opportunity, but of love. The sole requirement for its attainment is the surrender of self in love, unreserved and unmeasured.

From the time of the Apostles to our own day there is not a single instance of a saint who was not also a man of prayer. St. John Climacus calls meditation the "channel of all graces," "the destroyer of vice," "the food of the soul." St. John Chrysostom regarded the soul that did not meditate as dead and affirmed besides that without mental prayer it is impossible to remain virtuous. Suarez would willingly have exchanged all his knowledge of theology for one half hour of prayer well made. The Fathers of the Church call prayer a "chain of gold" or the "ladder of Jacob," which unites us with heaven, raising our desires to God and bringing down His blessings upon us. The extent of our penetration of the divine mysteries is proportionate to the use we make of the privilege of prayer. Furthermore, whatever outward success may accompany our works, our spiritual success is in exact accordance with the intensity of our prayer.

More particularly considered, the necessity of prayer becomes even more clearly evident. What is a Sister of the Holy Cross? Is she not one who is dedicated to the work of sanctifying her own soul and of working for the salvation of others? It is for this purpose that she has been freed from the impediment of worldly cares. What holiness is required by her high vocation! What lively faith and ardent charity, what purity of heart, modesty, recollection, detachment, and love of the Church should characterize her! But these virtues suppose habitual union with God and such union can be reached only through the life of prayer. In prayer we find the supernatural light which reveals to us our own nothingness, the vanity of the world, and the infinite grandeur of God. Here faith is reanimated, hope is nourished, and love enkindled. Here we learn the malice of sin, and the value of an immortal soul. Where else than in prayer can we find the energy, the apostolic courage, the supernatural view that will keep us from being seduced by self-love or discouraged by failure in the work assigned us?

O my God, how far am I from the spirit of prayer which animated the saints! Deign to grant me perseverance even when I find prayer difficult and disagreeable. Help me to be faithful to my spiritual exercises, especially meditation, without self-seeking and always in union with Jesus and Mary.

## *Baptism*



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“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

See Jesus on the mountain of Galilee giving His followers their final charge to baptize the peoples of all nations with His baptism, which replaced the baptism of John.

Divine Savior, grant me a better understanding of the spiritual regeneration which was begun in me by my reception of the Sacrament of Baptism.

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After the humanity of the Incarnate Word, the creation of the most blessed Virgin Mary, and the establishment of the Church, Baptism is the most marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. Before we received this sacrament we possessed only a natural life. Our souls, estranged from God by original sin, were as truly dead in His eyes as our bodies would be without the soul. This is why Baptism is sometimes called a “second birth”; *“Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit,”* said our Savior, *“he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”* This rebirth is accomplished by means of water which has been sanctified by the same Holy Spirit who in the days of the creation of the universe *moved over the waters*. The font of Baptism becomes for the Christian soul as the sacred spring of a new creation, as the womb of the mother to the body of her child. By this sacrament the Christian is dedicated forever and unreservedly to the service

of God; he is *sanctified*, deserving the title *saint* which the Apostle Paul gives to all baptized Christians.

Baptism, furthermore, is a double mystery, a mystery of life and death. In receiving this sacrament the Christian becomes one with Christ who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; consequently, the recipient of Baptism is to endeavor throughout his life to bring to full realization this double aspect of his union with Christ. St. Paul is explicit on this point. He says, *For we were buried with him by means of Baptism unto death, in order that, just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.* This double mystery was formerly symbolized by the rite of Baptism itself, for the neophyte was immersed in the water as a figure of his entrance into the tomb. In returning to the surface he came forth, as it were, to a new life, just as Christ rose from the sepulcher freed from all infirmity and endowed with perfect life.

The Christian life, therefore, is but the continuous development, the translation into our daily conduct of this double supernatural effect of "death and life" produced in Baptism. Herein is the first principle and the program of Christianity. The very life and death of Christ begin to be reproduced in our souls from the moment that we are baptized. The death that is to come about through this sacrament, however, is a death unto life; for our ultimate beatitude is only the glorious unfolding of the divine supernatural life which was infused into our souls when we were baptized. And this life in its fullness means total and everlasting freedom from sin and suffering and death.

O God, enable me to understand something of the nobility of the supernatural origin and destiny that is mine by Your

mercy. You are the beginning and end of my supernatural life; infinity is its scope, eternity its duration. Make me ever faithful to my baptismal renouncement of Satan and his works and pomps, and let this fidelity be the proof of my gratitude for Your infinite goodness.

MAY 7

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### *Preparation for Pentecost*



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“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Represent to yourself Jesus addressing these words, almost the last He spoke on earth, to the Apostles.

O Holy Spirit of God, help me to prepare worthily for Your coming.

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In preparing for the great feast of Pentecost, we could do no better than imitate the Apostles. From the Acts we learn that they prepared by retreat, prayer, and holy desire. Before leaving this earth Jesus had said to them, “*But wait here in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.*” According to this command of their divine Master, the Apostles were not to return to Galilee to rejoin their families and take up again their occupations. They were to remain in Jerusalem and await *the promise of the Father*. Those intervening days were to be a period of recollection and tranquillity. For the most part the time was spent in the Cenacle, in reality the first Christian Church, hallowed for the Apostles by such solemn and recent memories. They

left the upper room, it seems, only to go to the Temple. *And they were continually in the temple*, writes St. Luke.

Retirement, prayer, and recollection are always a source of good for us. We find them difficult, recollection especially, for it runs counter to our sensuality and our tendency toward scattering our energies. Yet it is only through recollection that the soul can become strong and properly disposed to hear the words of God: *Behold, I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart*. If we wish to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we must make our hearts other cenacles from which the noise, the distraction of the world and its useless comings and goings will be strictly excluded.

To recollection should be joined prayer, again in imitation of the Apostles, who *persevered with one mind in prayer*. What prayer that must have been, presided over by Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and offered in expectation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit! Just as in the Old Testament ardent longing for the coming of the Redeemer was transmitted from generation to generation, so in those days which followed the Ascension fervent prayer was prolonged from hour to hour in order to hasten the coming of the Paraclete. May His descent, now so near, find us also united in persevering prayer made in the name of Jesus and in union with Mary! Ours, like hers, should be a prayer less of words than of desires—a strong aspiration of the soul for which words are unnecessary.

“Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful ones and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created; and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” Renew, O divine Paraclete, the face of this world, which does not know You, which knows and loves only itself,

and fill us with Your Gifts, whom You have called to instruct and convert the world.

MAY 8

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## *The Humility of Mary*



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“Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid” (Lk. 1:48).

In this verse Mary refers to the lowliness of her nature, condition, and sex, from which God has elevated her to a sublime degree in dignity, interior holiness, and external glory.

O Mary, help me to become meek and humble of heart like you and Jesus.

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“Herein,” says St. Augustine, “lies the cause of Mary’s joy: that He beheld the humility of His handmaid. It is as if she were saying, ‘I rejoice because of the grace that God has granted me, for it is from Him that I have received the reason for this joy; and I rejoice in Him, because I love His gifts for love of Him.’” Mary did not think herself capable of attracting the divine gaze, for she was nothing; but God in His goodness had turned toward her, and in the divine mercy she found a sure ground of confidence. Mary had been troubled at hearing herself praised by the angel Gabriel and when Elizabeth said, “*Blessed art thou among women! . . . And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*” she answered by referring all to God to whom alone honor is due, saying, “*My soul magnifies the Lord.*” She, the highest and most



exalted of creatures, ever turned her gaze away from herself and sought all her greatness in God. She knew that she had received great graces and had never offended God, but she was also clearly aware of the infinite majesty of God and her own nothingness; and now in her canticle she adverts to herself only in order to proclaim her lowliness and obscurity.

Although our Lady's words in this portion of her canticle seem not to refer directly to the virtue of humility, some of the Fathers have thought that the Holy Spirit, speaking through Mary, was here setting before us this excellence of His Spouse particularly; for of all the virtues He beheld in her, He loved her humility most of all. "There are two kinds of humility," says St. Bernard. "The first is the daughter of truth; it is cold and without warmth. The second is the daughter of charity and it inflames us. The first consists of knowledge, the second, of love. By the first we are made aware of our own nothingness and we learn this kind of humility from ourselves and from our own wretchedness and weakness. By the second we trample underfoot the glory of the world, and this humility we learn from Him who annihilated Himself and fled when they sought Him out to offer Him the glory of royalty. But when they hunted Him down to crucify Him and plunge Him into the depths of opprobrium and ignominy, instead of fleeing, He voluntarily offered Himself."

Our Lady possessed in a supreme degree both the humility of knowledge and the humility of love, but especially the latter. This virtue above all others made her pleasing to God. It is again the Abbot of Clairvaux who tells us that the virginity of Mary would not have been at all pleasing to God without her humility, and that the Holy Spirit would not have descended upon her, if she had not been humble;

and if He had not descended upon her she would not have become the Mother of God. "Virginity is highly praiseworthy," continues St. Bernard, "but humility is necessary; the former is counseled, the latter is commanded. You can be saved without virginity, but there is no salvation without humility."

O Mary, Queen of humble souls, you see how far I am from the practice of true and perfect humility. Obtain for me from Jesus the pardon of all the sins I have committed against this great and necessary virtue; and deign to offer to Jesus your own humble heart in reparation for my pride. Entreat our Lord, O my Mother, to grant me the grace I need to imitate faithfully and truly the most holy humility of your Immaculate Heart and the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

MAY 9

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### *Blessed Among Women*



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"For, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk. 1:48).

The praise of the Mother of our Savior, so ardently begun by Elizabeth and echoed by the woman in the crowd during the public life of Jesus, has never ceased in the Church. The writings of the Fathers and of Mary's clients in every Christian century, the feasts established in her honor, the places of pilgrimage where throngs gather at every season of the year to venerate her, and the devotions inspired by filial love of Mary bear witness to the truth of her prophecy in the *Magnificat*.

Holy Mother of God and my Mother, accept my homage and let me feel the fruits of your pity.

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Mary's humility, profound though it was, did not lessen her realization of the greatness of God's favors to her. She was deeply conscious of her incomparable dignity as Mother of the Savior, and she saw clearly that Elizabeth's words of praise would echo and re-echo down all the centuries to come. It was necessary, indeed, that Mary's unique humility be accompanied by the highest regard for the exalted place she held among all other women. Without the understanding of the true significance of her mission, she could not have entered upon her sublime office with fitting reverence and esteem. The inspired prophecy of Mary, foretelling that all generations were to acknowledge and acclaim the Mother of the Savior, applies to the whole universe, from the highest heaven to the lowest depths of hell.

The Eternal Father honors Mary as the Mother of His only-begotten Son and has granted her an authority second only to His own in heaven and on earth. The Incarnate Son of God during His public life proclaimed Mary blessed because she had heard the Word of God and kept it, and now He continues to promote her honor by revealing through His Church the grandeur that is hers as His Virgin Mother. The Holy Spirit acclaims her as His most holy Spouse and, by the unparalleled infusion of His grace, as the Queen of all the saints. The choirs of angels have as their chief activity, after the adoration they continually render to God, the proclaiming of the praises of their Queen; and the hosts of the blessed unceasingly acknowledge her as the Cause of their joy.

On earth, Mary is blessed in every "Hail Mary" that has

been said since the foundation of the Church militant; and it is "through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin" that the Church on earth prays for the deliverance of the souls in the Church suffering. As for the souls in hell, if, as St. Thomas Aquinas asserts, the damned are punished less than they deserve, the mitigation of the full torment merited by their sins is surely owing to the divine Mercy. But every effect of grace or mercy that comes to us from the divine Bounty is evoked by the intercession of the Mother of Mercy. Even the souls in hell, therefore, should bless and praise Mary as their Benefactor; but since they do not do this, it is for us to compensate for their neglect and to ask the inhabitants of heaven to unite their atoning praise with ours. The fallen angels, likewise, despite their fury against the Virgin because of the souls she rescues from their snares, are forced to acknowledge her power and leave their victims at the pronouncement of her name as well as at the holy name of Jesus. Thus, even hell, by experiencing the effects of our Lady's intercession and by acknowledging her power, joins, as it were, with the Church triumphant, militant, and suffering, and the Most Holy Trinity Itself, in fulfilling this glorious prophecy of the Virgin Mary: "*Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*"

O Mary, I am filled with joy at the thought that your praises resound in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory, and are handed down from age to age throughout all generations. I implore the Most Blessed Trinity to fulfill your prophecy more and more everywhere in the universe. With all my heart I join the whole Church in saying to you, O Mary: "Blessed is the womb of the Virgin Mary which bore the Son of the Eternal Father and blessed are the breasts that nourished Him." Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, and grant the aid and consolation of your incomparable goodness to all who honor you.

## *The Gift of Fear*



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“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 110:10). Awaken in yourself the sentiments of awe at the greatness and sovereign majesty of God which are the special characteristics of the Gift of the fear of the Lord.

O Holy Spirit, grant me that holy fear which will lead me to God and keep me united with Him.

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The Gift of fear is a movement of the Holy Spirit which causes us to fear God as a Father and to avoid sin because it displeases Him. Holy fear of the Lord disposes us to adoration, and it is entirely consistent with hope and love. It is not a servile dread of eternal punishment, but a reverential, filial fear based on faith, which keeps the soul attentive to the authority of God and makes her shun the slightest offense to His infinite majesty; *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*, St. Paul admonishes us. His words are both a warning against false security and an exhortation to the performance of duty in the broadest and most elevated sense of the word, namely, as signifying the whole effort of our sanctification.

Through the Gift of fear, compunction for sin is preserved in our hearts; we are kept mindful of the fact that we are sinners, wholly dependent upon God's mercy, and that as yet we are not safe except in hope. Inasmuch as holy fear is filial fear, it goes hand in hand with love. In the Collect for the Sunday after Corpus Christi, the Church

bids us ask at the same time for fear and for love. The soul that lives in the holy fear of God thrills at the greatness and nearness of the divine Majesty. She sees in God the almighty Power that created us, that preserves us, and rules us, and the supreme Justice that will demand an accounting for every idle word. The holier the soul, the more keenly does it experience that confusion at the sight of its own unworthiness which is the sign of advancement in the process of purification.

It is this harmonious blending of respect, of confidence, of compunction, and of fidelity in the service of God that is implied in the Gift of fear. Let us pass our days in this good fear of God, living in His holy presence, appearing before Him always with a humble and contrite heart, faithful and attentive to His perfect service, for *he that feareth God neglecteth nothing*. We should pray often for the grace of a lively sorrow for even our least faults, because they offend an infinite God who is infinitely good; our sorrow will then inspire the eagerness to atone, and so we shall multiply our acts of sacrifice and love. We should also be watchful to avoid sin and all its occasions, fleeing from sin, *as from the face of a serpent*. Then shall we enjoy the happiness and security which Scripture repeatedly links with holy fear: *Happy are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways*; and again, *No evil can harm the man who fears the Lord; through trials, again and again he is safe*.

O divine Paraclete, let Your Gift of holy fear remain with me as a protection against pride and tepidity. Let it keep ever before my mind the greatness and holiness of Him who is my Creator and Judge and rid my soul of all fear of creatures, of all cowardly subservience to human opinions. Teach me, O Holy Spirit, to serve the divine Majesty in fear, yet with

peace and joy of heart, according to the words of David:  
*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him; with trembling pay homage to him.*

MAY 11

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## *The Gift of Piety*



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“For bodily training is of little profit, while godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

Think of the Gift of piety as filling the soul of Jesus with the most reverential affection for His Father and the most compassionate tenderness for the children of Adam.

Divine Spirit of God, I ask the grace to live in the practice of Christian piety toward God and my neighbor.

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The Gift of piety inspires in us a filial affection for God and urges us to honor Him as our Father. The Gift of fear inclines the will toward the performance of duty, out of filial respect for God, whereas piety gently affects the heart, disposing it to filial love of its Creator. It fosters in the soul a stronger inclination to occupy itself with God and perform its spiritual duties. Spiritual exercises come to be viewed not as routine duties, but as fulfilling the need and longing of the heart for God; and when aridity is sent to try the soul, it is patiently, even joyfully, accepted as coming from a Father who hides Himself that His child may seek Him. The soul in whom this Gift is active experiences a sweet impression of liberty, joyous abandonment, and filial

confidence in the service of God, that is to be distinguished from a mere religious frame of mind or vague sentimentality that does not move the will.

The transformation effected by the Gift of piety was indicated by our Lord when He said, "*No longer do I call you servants. . . . But I have called you friends.*" Solely occupied with the divine good pleasure, the soul regards with indifference the various aspects of the works assigned her. Having God in view rather than her own gratification, she no longer consults her feelings and preferences, but succeeds finally in liking all she has to do. This supernatural conception of things enables us to perform acts of obedience, not in the dispositions of a servant, but in those of a child, rejoicing in the opportunity to prove the reality of our love for our Father. Duty is then not measured by obligation, but by love; it is interpreted as consisting not of what God expressly asks, but of all that is pleasing to Him.

The piety inspired by the Holy Spirit of God is, moreover, a profound sentiment that takes possession of our whole being; it is not a matter of short-lived impulses that seize us unpredictably on certain days or at certain moments and that remain superficial. It is not a matter of temperament; as, for example, impressionable natures express a certain piety in sentimentality, ardent natures in exterior works, indolent persons in reverie; nor does the Gift manifest itself in a selfish piety that looks for consolations, nor in passive piety that remains inert when it should act. The true exercise of this Gift, which perfects the virtue of religion, is strong, virile, constant. And intimately joined with the constant, persevering service of God in the soul actively possessed of piety is a tender compassion for her fellow men. She practices kindness toward all without exception, as children



of a common Father. She forgives injuries, bears with the faults of others, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. This Gift, like holy fear and all the other Gifts, becomes active in proportion to our fidelity in corresponding with grace. Although the Gifts are present in everyone who has been *born again* and is in the state of grace, however low may be the level of his spiritual life, yet their action as perfecting the virtues is the fruit of response to grace.

O blessed Paraclete, grant that the Gift of piety may produce its fruits in me. Permit me not to stifle it by self-love. Inspire me with a filial love for my Creator and Father and make every creature of God dear to me for His sake.

MAY 12

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### *The Gift of Knowledge*



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“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk, then, as children of light” (Eph. 5:8).

These words of St. Paul, addressed to the converts at Ephesus, may be referred to the operation of the Gift of knowledge.

O Holy Spirit, grant me the grace to advance daily in the science of the saints.

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As the Gift of fear of the Lord moves us to fulfill our duties, and as the Gift of piety causes us to love them, so knowledge perfects our judgment and makes us capable of distinguishing with certitude between true and false, good and evil. When we hesitate as to which course we should

take, when human respect resists our impulse to do that which is just and right, or an unworthy fear of speaking out cunningly assumes the guise of prudence and sometimes of charity, then the Gift of knowledge will show us plainly the path of duty. It is the complement of the Christian conscience, whose vision it sharpens and to whose decisions it imparts firmness. From infused knowledge derives that supernatural instinct which unmask error and discerns with a special, keen perception the world's subtleties and artifices. We are enabled by it to perceive quickly and correctly that which concerns our own sanctification and the sanctification of others. It shows us clearly the depths of our soul, its secret movements, their source and motives, and the effects these may produce. It teaches us how best to deal with others in the interests of their salvation.

Through the Gift of knowledge a brighter light is shed upon the things of earth and heaven, so that the soul is strengthened and confirmed in truth. *"But when he, the Spirit of truth has come,"* said our Savior, *"he will teach you all the truth."* It is because the saints never lose sight of the mysterious affinity that links earth with heaven, the finite with the infinite, the creature with the Creator, that they live always and everywhere in the presence of God. The operation of the Holy Spirit through this Gift imparts to us a more practical knowledge of created things in their relation to God and also of divine things, within the limitations imposed by our life on earth. Moreover, it gives such knowledge instantly, as Adam possessed it before his sin, without labor of study and demonstration.

Again, the Gift of knowledge, in perfecting the virtue of faith, adds a special excellence whereby we see the truth more clearly, advance in it more surely, and affirm and defend it

with greater certitude and zeal. On our part, in order that we may dispose ourselves for the active operation of this Gift within our souls, positive efforts should be made to arrive at the light: efforts at prayer and efforts toward knowing God better through study. At the same time we should try to keep our hearts detached from earthly things and free from stain, for sight is promised to the *clean of heart*. It is through detachment alone that we can ultimately be brought to see in creatures that alone which can lead us to their Maker. St. Paul teaches us this very forcefully in the words: *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as dung that I may gain Christ.*

O divine Spirit of God, be ever with me assisting me to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong. Make my eye single, as Jesus has counseled, that my actions, desires, and thoughts may be full of light; preserve me from the obscurity and blindness that arise from the corruptness of my own nature and from the false judgments of the world.

MAY 13

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### *The Gift of Fortitude*



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“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . . the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude” (Isa. 11:2).

When the difficulties and trials of life come upon man, he inclines now to cowardice and discouragement; now, through natural impetuosity and pride, to rash and impulsive action. These responses to adversity are perilous for the soul in the spiritual combat. The Holy Spirit, therefore, brings to it a

new source of strength, namely, supernatural fortitude.

O Holy Spirit, assist me in this meditation toward a true appreciation of the Gift of fortitude, that I may pray for it more fervently.

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This Gift is in a special manner the Paraclete's own, for in His sacrament, Confirmation, we receive the Holy Spirit that we may be strong. In our lifelong spiritual struggle against the devil, the world, and ourselves, it is evident that we need supernatural aid that will control our tendency toward either exaggerated fear or excessive confidence in ourselves. Fortitude supplies for our deficiencies and restrains our rash impulses. It is true that at Baptism the virtue of fortitude together with the other moral virtues was infused by the Holy Spirit into our souls, and that fortitude, the virtue, forearms us against undue fear of difficulty, supports us in our daily efforts, and helps us to persevere; but even with this help we are still hesitant, timid, and fainthearted. In other words, there is still a great deal of ourselves involved in the exercise of the virtue of fortitude; but that which comes to pass through the operation of the Gift is not so much the result of our action as it is of the strong impulse of the Holy Spirit. The virtue of fortitude may serve us well in ordinary difficulties, but when the task becomes arduous, we need the special assistance of the Gift. St. Stephen, fearlessly confronting his executioners; St. Paul, offering his neck to the sword; St. Peter, crucified head downward at his own request—these are the trophies of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gift of fortitude; for we must remember that by nature the souls of the martyrs were as weak and cowardly as our own.

Sometimes the spirit of heroism is needed even for everyday

difficulties. The control of anger, the moderation of zeal, the conquest of the unkind impulse, and scores of other natural human weaknesses may require under certain circumstances the special service of the Holy Spirit. "To do and to suffer" is the summary of every human life; it is in action and endurance, especially in the cause of extraordinary undertakings, that the effects of the Gift of fortitude are made manifest. We are enabled, for example, by the help of this Gift to undertake without fear or hesitation such arduous works as the practice of perfect recollection in the midst of the activity imposed upon us by duty, as did St. Vincent de Paul and St. Teresa; or the contempt of honors and human respect, dreading only sin, like St. John Chrysostom; or the facing of perils and labors, even death, like St. Francis Xavier. Suffering or endurance, the more difficult task, means constancy, patience, and magnanimity in bearing all trials of soul and body, even to martyrdom, for God's sake, in the confident spirit of St. Paul when he said, *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*

O Holy Spirit, deign to accept the prayer I offer You, borrowing from St. Paul whom You Yourself inspired: Clothe me with the armor of God that I may be able to resist in the evil day and stand in all things perfect. Gird me about with truth and arm me with the breastplate of justice. Let faith be my shield and my helmet the hope of salvation. Place in my hand the sword of the spirit which is the word of God, that I may defeat my enemies and gain the crown of eternal life.

## *The Gift of Counsel*



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“For what man knows God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans” (Wisd. 9:13, 14).

As the will follows the dictates of the intellect, so the intellect and will truly and infallibly follow the light given to them by the Holy Spirit through the Gift of counsel, especially in matters that transcend the powers of natural reason.

O Holy Spirit, grant me the Gift of counsel, that I may discern clearly and with certainty the best means of working out my salvation.

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The Gift of knowledge gives us a speculative idea of duty, keen discernment of our goal, and general rules for its attainment. The Gift of counsel, which perfects the virtue of prudence, enlightens the soul as to the special application of God’s law to particular cases and as to the practical performance of duty. By this Gift the reason is enabled to discern not only right and wrong, not only the way of obedience, but the way of perfection. It makes us know which of two things, both right and good, is better and more pleasing to God; and it also prompts the will to put into execution that which we see to be the higher and better course.

This precious Gift has a bearing upon our whole life, for we are continually in a position of having to decide between two courses of action. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to be our

Counselor, if we will permit Him to be. But in order that His inspirations may not be lost upon us, we must be on our guard against the weakness of our nature, against natural impulse, which is only too often the sole motive of our actions; against rashness, which causes us to follow whatever feeling happens to be uppermost; against precipitation, which prompts us to act before we have considered both sides of the case; against indifference, which makes us decide at random, through reluctance to take the trouble of examining which course is the better. Our interests and appetites often assert themselves in our decisions far more strongly than good sense and far more imperatively than conscience.

Even when we hold our inner consultation with all appropriate calmness and sincerity, even when our natural judgment is under the dominion of the supernatural virtue of prudence, it may happen at the most critical moments that the conscience remains perplexed and the soul is not at peace. Then is the time to have recourse to the Spirit of counsel; for the Gift of counsel is a practical intuition, a supernatural discernment that quickens and refines the virtue of prudence, raising it to a level inaccessible to its unaided powers. This special light of the Holy Spirit is necessary for us in many phases of our life; for example, when we are at a loss how to reconcile an interior life with one of zeal, or the affection due to souls with perfect chastity, or the simplicity of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent. To cultivate the Gift of counsel we require, first of all, a deep realization of our own weakness, and then frequent prayer to the Holy Spirit that He may teach us His ways. He will not refuse a humble petition for help. We should accustom ourselves to listening to His voice, to judging all things by His light, and following the least of His inspirations. If He

finds our souls recollected and docile, He will speak to us more and more frequently.

Come, Holy Ghost, send down those beams,  
Which sweetly flow in silent streams  
From Thy bright throne above.

. . . . .

O blessed Light of life Thou art,  
Fill with Thy life the inmost hearts  
Of those that hope in Thee.

. . . . .

Lord, wash our sinful stains away,  
Water from heaven our barren clay,  
Our wounds and bruises heal.

To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow,  
Warm with Thy love our hearts of snow,  
Our wandering feet recall.

MAY 15

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*The Gift of Understanding*



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“Give me discernment that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart” (Ps. 118:34).

These words of the Psalmist refer to the effect of the Gift of understanding, whereby we penetrate more deeply into the supernatural truths of faith.

O Holy Spirit, prepare me to receive fully the Gift of understanding.

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By faith we believe revealed truths and by the Gift of knowledge we possess a reasoned certitude of these truths, but the Gift of understanding gives us as clear an insight into them as is possible for man in this life. This Gift, like a divine ray, casts its light upon supernatural truths, and causes them to shine, as it were, from within. This illumination does not resolve the mystery, it does not give us the intuitive vision of heaven, but it pierces deeply the cloud of darkness with which the mystery is veiled by words or images. It is thus a preparation for the spiritual discernment of contemplation. The other Gifts are connected with the purgative life and with the struggle against the triple concupiscence, but supernatural understanding and wisdom are concerned with the contemplative life. They suppose the restoration of order in the soul by means of mortification and the discipline of the appetites. There is nothing more opposed to the Gift of understanding than sensuality and the inordinate seeking after material comfort and well-being: *The sensual man, St. Paul tells us, does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is examined spiritually.*

The awakening of the Gift of understanding within us is brought about, first, by lively faith or, rather, by the habitual cultivation of the interior life; for if this Gift quickens faith, it is also the reward of faith and prayer. The second condition is mortification, which purifies the heart and the senses: "*Blessed are the pure of heart,*" said our Savior, "*for they shall see God.*" Under the light imparted to us by the Gift of understanding, the articles of faith, the rites of the sacred liturgy, the words of Holy Scripture reveal their living and mysterious splendors. Supernatural understanding is, in short,

of immense importance for the salvation and sanctification of our souls. We should ask the Holy Spirit for it in full measure with the most earnest supplications, for it is to be obtained rather by the longings of our love than by any efforts of our intellect. This Gift will be stronger or weaker in our souls according to the degree of our correspondence with the other Gifts. Its safeguards are humility, restraint of earthly desires, and interior recollection. Be singlehearted and humble in your own eyes and that which God hides from the *wise and prudent*, He will reveal to you, *a little one*.

O God, *be good to your servant, that I may live and keep your words. Open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of your law. I am a wayfarer of earth; hide not your commands from me. . . . The way of truth I have chosen; I have set your ordinances before me. I cling to your decrees; O Lord, let me not be put to shame. I will run the way of your commands when you give me a docile heart* (Ps. 118:17-19, 30-32).

MAY 16

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## *The Gift of Wisdom*



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“For the inclination of the flesh is death, but the inclination of the spirit, life and peace. For the wisdom of the flesh is hostile to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be” (Rom. 8:6, 7).

St. Paul here contrasts the wisdom that is imparted by the spirit of the world and things of sense with supernatural wisdom which is the perfection of all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the highest stage in the mystical ascent of the Gifts.

O Holy Spirit, make me worthy of supernatural wisdom, the crown of all Your Gifts.

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Wisdom is the Gift of the Holy Spirit which communicates to us in the highest degree the knowledge and love of divine things. It differs from the Gift of knowledge in that it causes us to see and love truth in God Himself as its first cause rather than by means of creatures. Furthermore, knowledge is not accompanied, or at least not in the same degree as wisdom, by the relish and love of divine things. There is between these Gifts the difference that exists between contemplating supernatural truths and loving them, between knowing that honey is sweet and tasting its sweetness. Supernatural wisdom is also higher than, although connected with, the Gift of understanding. That which is shown us by understanding is held and relished by wisdom.

When the Psalmist bids us relish our Sovereign Good, *Taste and see how good the Lord is*, he calls us to the operations of holy wisdom, to the full perfection of holiness. The Church prays on the day of Pentecost that we may *relish* what is right and just, for the union of the soul with God in this life is rather an experience of tasting than of sight. Understanding is the clear light of the soul, wisdom is its heat—it is union through love. Again, wisdom, the Gift, differs from the wisdom we acquire by study and even that bestowed on us by grace, which has not the depth of certitude that is proper to the Gift. Supernatural wisdom has its origin in the truth known by faith, certified by knowledge, penetrated by supernatural understanding, and applied to particular acts by counsel. This highest Gift of the Holy Spirit then illumines the truth in all its parts, as with a single glance, and draws the practical conclusions which make

our intellectual and moral life conform to the divine Mind.

The contemplation of truth which leads to holiness takes possession of the whole soul: of the intellect by supernatural understanding and of the will by supernatural wisdom. Understanding engenders love, but love is only perfect when it effects absolute conformity of the human will with the will of God. True contemplation, then, implies forgetfulness of self, self-oblation, total surrender; it urges the soul, on the other hand, to that transcendent virtue which does not shrink from heroic effort. The beginnings of the contemplative way are arid, harsh, arduous. The gate that leads to the higher regions of spirituality is narrow and to pass through it the soul must discard earthly encumbrances; she must aspire wholly to heavenly things. We should ask the Holy Spirit fervently and often to make us understand the value of the Gift of God which is holy wisdom, so that we may be not only willing but eager to divest ourselves of all things in order to obtain it. Then, in tasting God through the operations of this most precious Gift, our souls will be made conformable to Him. *The wisdom that is from above, St. James tells us, is first of all chaste, then peaceable, moderate, docile, in harmony with good things, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation.*

*God of my fathers, Lord of mercy . . . give me Wisdom, the attendant at your throne, and reject me not from among your children; for I am your servant, the son of your handmaid, a man weak and short-lived and lacking in comprehension of judgment and of laws. . . . Send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne dispatch her, that she may be with me and work with me, that I may know what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and will guide me discreetly in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory (Wisd. 9:1, 4, 5, 10, 11).*

*The "Great Things" Done in Mary*



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“Because he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name; and for generation upon generation is his mercy, to those who fear him” (Lk. 1:49, 50).

In the preceding verse the Blessed Virgin had prophesied that all generations would call her blessed; in this case, she reveals the reason for this honor, namely, the great things God has done for her; moreover, she affirms that her joy will be the joy of all men of good will.

O Mary, obtain for me that holy fear which is the beginning of wisdom.

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What are the *great things* that *he who is mighty* has done for Mary? All the wonders ever witnessed on the earth are as nothing when compared with the redemptive Incarnation, the mightiest work of Him who is mighty. God could create more and larger worlds, vaster skies, more brilliant suns, but, says St. Bonaventure, He could not make a more excellent or nobler mother than Mary; for if He could He would have to give her a more excellent Son. Such great things did God do for Mary that He placed it in her power to give Him, as it were, even greater gifts than those He had bestowed upon her. From God Mary received the gifts of life, of the fullness of grace, of being blessed above all other women; but Mary, as His agent, made it possible for God to be our Emmanuel, that is, “our present God” and also our Redeemer through the precious blood He received from her. Because of Mary, Jesus as man is universal judge and

as man sits at the right hand of the Father. If our Savior gave the Apostles the power to perform miracles greater than those He Himself performed, as He tells us in the Gospel, should we wonder that He granted to His most holy Mother the power to give to Him gifts greater than those she had received? Then, having acknowledged the infinite value of God's favors, Mary added, "*And holy is his name*"; thus she recalls to mind the prophecy of the great things wrought in her made by the Psalmist when he said, *He has sent deliverance to his people; he has ratified his covenant forever; holy and awesome is his name.*

It is not only to Mary that God shows His power, holiness, and mercy, but to all His faithful servants. Not only she herself, but the whole human race would profit by what the Almighty had done in her. As she had prophesied that all generations would call her blessed, so now she made another prophecy, affirming that the mercy of God would extend from generation unto generation *to those who fear him*. This divine mercy, according to St. Augustine is "our most bountiful Savior." All the effects of the divine mercy that mankind has experienced from the beginning of time until now, and all that will be produced throughout eternity derive from the adorable mystery of the Incarnation. Although mercy, like all the divine attributes, is shared equally by the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, it is, nevertheless, particularly ascribed to the Person of the Son, as power is to the Father, and bounty to the Holy Spirit. It is particularly the Incarnate Word who acquired for us at the cost of His precious blood a share in the dominion that the Eternal Father had given Him. But our Savior did not will to accomplish this work by Himself. In addition to acting in union with His Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus willed to associate His Virgin

Mother with the great work of His mercy. The new Adam, like the old, was to have a helpmate. Since *it is not good for man to be alone*, the Eternal Father gave His beloved Son a Mother who co-operated with Him in the great work of the salvation of the world.

O most powerful and benign Virgin, I give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for making you so mighty and so merciful. Humbly I implore you to exercise the great power God has given you in my behalf, for the total destruction of whatever in me is displeasing to Him and to you, and to establish in its stead the perfect reign of your divine Son. O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Mercy, pray for us.

MAY 18

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*Mary's Praise of the Divine Power*



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“He has shown might with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Lk. 1:51-53).

These verses of the *Magnificat* in which Mary summarizes the effects of God's action in the world: His rejection of the proud and the worldly rich and powerful and His goodness to the poor and lowly are as a brief anticipation of the Sermon on the Mount.

O Mary, make the kingdom of God come within me and all mankind.

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From the instant of Mary's consent to the Incarnation, a Christian revolution was inaugurated whereby the kingdom of pride, self-seeking, material power, and confidence in human resources was to be overthrown, and a divine plan was to reshape the human order. In His eternal decrees God had already reversed the order established by sin, which advocated the belief in man and confidence in human might instead of faith in God and in His power to make use of the weak things of this world to confound the strong. The sublime mysteries which God had hidden from the wise would now be revealed to *little ones*. The miracle of grace was to appear in those whom the world would judge entirely unfit and unworthy. Mary herself is an example of what God does through a little one. Upon her lowliness was built the new kingdom with its supernatural laws and power based upon poverty, humility, and weakness.

Mary knew that in co-operating with the work of the Redemption she was associating herself with a work of sorrow. She rejoiced in this and, also, in the knowledge that God was not going to draw her out of her poverty and obscurity, nor do for her any great human thing. And she who at the beginning of the *Magnificat* had praised God for His regarding of her lowliness, now included herself among the multitudes of the lowly whom the power of God exalts, hiding thus in a general thanksgiving her own unique and unspeakable privilege.

Moreover, Jesus at His birth would manifest His power by the very weakness in which He came to exalt the *little ones*. The Incarnate Word Himself is the *arm* whereby God scatters the proud and puts down the mighty from their thrones and sends the rich away empty. It was through Christ that the Father created all things, it was through Him



that we were redeemed and heaven was opened. The firmament is the work of God's *fingers*, but the mystery of the Incarnation, surpassing incomparably all the other works of His power, belongs to the *arm* of the divine Might. The strength of this *arm* of God was to bring the Apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins their virtue and their triumph, and through their weakness was to break the strength of a proud paganism. Jesus, in His turn, would also say, "*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. . . . Woe to you rich! for you are now having your comfort. . . . Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. . . . Woe to you who are filled! for you shall hunger.*"

It was through your humility, O Mary, Handmaid of the Lord, that these great things were accomplished. On behalf of all mankind whose sadness has been changed into joy through your mediation, we say, "*Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; thou art the joy of Israel.*" In the name of all women whose shame was blotted out by the blessed Fruit of your womb, we say, "*Thou art the honor of our people.*" Most humble Virgin, make humility, which is the source of all blessings, reign in our hearts and efface from them the cause of all evils: arrogance and pride.

MAY 19

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## *The Promises of Mary*



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"He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of his mercy — even as he spoke to our fathers — to Abraham and to his posterity forever" (Lk. 1:54, 55).

The last verses of the *Magnificat* echo the earlier ones in speak-

ing of God's goodness to Israel and of His fidelity to the promises made of old to Abraham and through the prophets. O Mary, obtain for me the grace really to place myself without reserve and forever under your protection and guidance.

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The words "*He has given help to Israel, his servant*" serve, in a sense, as a conclusion to the Old Testament, to the Law and the Prophets. The great promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then to the prophets coming after them was now fulfilled by the coming of the Redeemer. Mary's song of exultation dies away in a quiet confidence and tranquillity, for she already bears Jesus within her and is conscious of His strength protecting her. The final words of her canticle also remind us of the truth of God's word and His fidelity to His promises. *He is the faithful God who keeps his merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation toward those who love him and keep his commandments*: In the Apocalypse the Holy Spirit speaks of Christ as *faithful and true*; and Holy Mother Church ascribes this same quality to Mary in invoking her as "Virgin most faithful." Our Lady is said to have revealed to certain of her clients that among all the titles of honor in her litanies, those most pleasing to her are "Mother most amiable," "Mother most admirable," and "Virgin most faithful." As she was always faithful to her Son and to the divine will, so she is faithful to her promises to us.

What are the promises of Mary? They are to be found in passages of Holy Scripture such as the following, which have been applied and transferred to her by the Liturgy. "*You that yearn for me, come over to me, all*, the Liturgy represents Mary as saying in words appropriated from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, *and be filled with my fruits. You will re-*

*member me as sweeter than honey, better to have than the honeycomb. He who eats of me, will hunger still, he who drinks of me will thirst for more; he who obeys me will not be put to shame, he who serves me will never fail."*

Similar sentiments are borrowed from the Book of Proverbs: "I, Wisdom, dwell with experience, and judicious knowledge I attain. . . . Mine are counsel and advice; mine is strength; I am understanding. By me kings reign, and lawgivers establish justice; by me princes govern, and nobles; all the rulers of earth. Those who love me I also love, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, yes, than pure gold, and my revenue than choice silver. On the way of duty I walk, along the paths of justice, granting wealth to those who love me, and filling their treasuries. . . . So now, O children, listen to me; instruction and wisdom do not reject! Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways. Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door posts; for he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord. . . . To him who lacks understanding, I say, Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed!"

Most faithful Virgin, make our trust in you as strong as yours was in the word of God, and help us to recite your *Magnificat*, so dear to all your children, with the gratitude, love, and confidence that you had in your heart; then it will soar from our lips, as it did from yours, straight to the very Throne of God. With St. Ambrose we pray, "Let your soul be in us that we may glorify the Lord; let your spirit be in us that we may rejoice in God our Savior."

## *The Mystery of the Ascension*



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“He parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:51).

See the Apostles gathered around Jesus during the last moments of His sojourn on earth.

Divine Savior, teach me to love and relish above all the things of the spirit.

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All the mysteries of the Word Incarnate end with His Ascension, as all the gifts of grace we receive end with our death. This last mystery of the earthly pilgrimage of our divine Master is the first of the mysteries of His heavenly life. As God He had never left heaven; as Man He willed to earn His right to enter it; and now, in order to complete His glory, He takes formal possession of His heavenly kingdom. This glory He received in essence at the Resurrection, but then He did not as yet enjoy the accidental splendor and happiness which is associated with actually dwelling in heaven. Through His Ascension, then, Jesus received the plenitude of glory: *He who descended, he it is who ascended also above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*

In our interest, too, it was fitting that the Savior ascend into heaven. He had finished His mission and established His Church. His visible presence here below had ceased to be necessary. It was *expedient* for us that He go to the Father. Expedient, because in this way heaven itself would be opened to us, because His going *to prepare a place* for us

would strengthen us in the life of faith and strongly confirm us in hope. Expedient, also, because our love would increase through the descent of the Paraclete, the Spirit of Love, who would not have come to us unless our Savior had ascended into heaven. The Ascension, moreover, confers a stupendous favor upon our human nature, which, in the Person of Jesus, has been raised above all the heavenly hierarchies and participates in the very glory of the Godhead, *above every Principality and Power and Virtue and Domination—in short, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.* Pope St. Leo beautifully said that the glory of Christ our Head is the hope of His Mystical Body, because in Him our humanity has attained to the very throne of God.

Again, the Ascension is the source of our salvation in the sense that through this mystery our Savior took possession of heaven in our name and became our Advocate in heaven with the Father. Finally, by allowing us to see Him visibly ascending heavenward, Jesus draws our gaze, so to speak, away from earth and leaves us looking in hope and desire toward heaven, the ultimate goal of all divine counsels and all human effort.

“O Jesus, Redeemer of mankind, joy of our hearts . . . give us to see Thy face and enrich us with Thy blessed light. Be Thou our Guide and our Way to heaven; be Thou the object of our hearts’ desire; be Thou the joy of our tears and the sweet recompense of a life spent for Thee!” (from a seventeenth-century version of a hymn by St. Ambrose.)

*Heaven*



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“I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:2).

Try to enter into the sentiments of exultation and confidence which these words of Jesus inspired in the Apostles.

Lord Jesus, grant me holy desire of heaven and indifference to the things of earth.

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*What is sown a natural body rises a spiritual body.* Agile, luminous, subtle, incapable of suffering—such will be the bodies of the elect in heaven. And when the glorified body is reunited with the blissful soul, the soul’s happiness will increase, because of the new and ineffable sensations which it will then be capable of experiencing without satiety and forever. What rapture it will be to contemplate the glorified body of Jesus, our Brother! *“From my flesh I shall see God,”* said holy Job; each of the elect can say also: My eyes, these eyes, are to see Jesus in all His majesty as the King of glory, in all His beauty as the Son of Man, in all His meekness as the Lamb of God. They shall see Mary, His Mother and ours, the Refuge and Consolation of our exile. In her we shall contemplate the glory of her Son and her own radiant splendor as Queen of heaven, raised to a throne above all thrones, except that of the Divinity. We shall see the innumerable army of the elect and all the beauties of paradise, of which St. Paul, who had beheld them, at least in spirit, could only say that the mind of man was unable to conceive of such magnificence.

Our minds will be illumined by the rays of the Sun of Justice. All darkness, uncertainty, and error will be dispelled, so that we shall know the most hidden mysteries. The ravishing beauty, infinite sanctity, and limitless mercy of our Creator will draw and hold our hearts in an endless, burning rapture of love. And this love, perfect and everlasting, will eternally give birth to changeless and ineffable joy. The very bliss of God will be communicated to us—or rather, it is in God Himself, God omnipotent, infinite, wise, glorious, and good that we shall be plunged and engulfed. The soul, as the Fathers tell us, will be filled with God, surrounded by God, penetrated with God. God within her as in His kingdom, she in God as in the center of her repose. God possessing her wholly and she wholly possessing God. The human tongue cannot speak nor can the human mind conceive of the joy of this possession. We cannot as yet comprehend what it is to be eternally hungry and eternally filled, ever ardent in desire and ever enraptured by fulfillment. Eternity! O heavenly Jerusalem! be henceforth the dearest object of my thoughts and desires, the motivating force of my life, the principle and consummation of my joy.

O my God, how happy will be the day when, my exile ended at last, You call me home! Make me so live every moment of my life on earth that I may be welcomed by You in that kingdom which has no end, where I shall see You, love You, and possess You forever.

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*The Ascension of Our Savior*

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“He was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:10).

Imagine that you are with our Lady and the Apostles and disciples as they watch Jesus ascending into heaven.

O Jesus, grant me to live my life in the spirit of this glorious mystery.

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It was from Jerusalem, the royal city of David, that Jesus willed to ascend into heaven and enter into His kingdom. It was in this holy city that the Apostles were bidden to remain until the coming of the Holy Spirit; and from Jerusalem also was to commence the preaching of the Gospel which would be proclaimed to the whole world. The Ascension did not, however, take place within Jerusalem itself. Jesus led His disciples outside the city proper to the Mount of Olives, where He had begun His passion and from where He will one day judge the world. Perhaps it was on the way thither that the disciples asked, “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” This was not the time to explain anew the meaning of the prophecies relating to the restoration of the throne of David, and so Jesus merely answered that the knowledge of the time and manner of this restoration was reserved to the Father.

Following this response He gave His disciples to understand that the kingdom of the Messiah, the new Israel, would receive its advancement, if not its perfection, through the



testimony of the Apostles, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, as Isaias had foretold: "*I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy stock; and the prophet Jeremias: Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love . . . and I will build thee again and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel.*" Jesus opened before them, also, the magnificent horizon of the future spread of His Church: "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth.*"

Then, blessing His own, the Master departed from their sight. With what love and longing must His Virgin Mother and His little band of followers have watched Jesus rising toward heaven! And what, we may reverently wonder, were the thoughts of our Savior as He saw the earth gradually vanishing in the distance! Oh, how brief is this life, how small our earth, how short-lived the suffering and sacrifices that can win for us, nevertheless, an unspeakably great and everlasting reward! Let us try to imagine, also, however imperfect our conception must necessarily be, the splendor that attended our Lord's entrance into His heavenly kingdom. Let us see the heavens opening to Him—heaven, the dwelling place of glory, of joy, of power. Accompanied by His foster father, St. Joseph, and all the elect of the Old Testament, Jesus receives the homage of the angelic hosts. He is welcomed by the Father and the Holy Spirit and He now takes His eternal place at the right hand of God; that is, He takes full possession forever of the power, the majesty, and the divine glory of the Father.

*Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in! Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift*

up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in! Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory (Ps. 23:7-10).

MAY 23

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## Our Lady, Queen of Apostles



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“Queen of Apostles, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

Mary is Queen of the Apostles because her dignity as Mother of God surpasses theirs. The Apostles were *the ministers of Christ, the dispensers of the mysteries of God*. Mary is she of whom *was born Jesus who is called Christ* and she is also the custodian of the mysteries of God. Moreover, Mary was the first Apostle, for she first gave Christ to the world and so achieved the essential aim of the apostleship.

O Mary my Mother, obtain for me an increase of apostolic zeal.

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On feasts of the Apostles and Evangelists, the Church sings at *Matins* a hymn written by St. Ambrose, which celebrates the glories of the Apostles in most exalted terms. They are acclaimed as “princes of the Church,” “soldiers of the heavenly court,” “the true light of the world,” in whom triumphs the glory of the Father and the Son and in whom the will of the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The Apostles were, moreover, the special choice of Jesus. He sanctified them, confirmed them in grace, and promised that they should one day sit with the Son of Man in His majesty *judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. Yet, high as the Apostles

are placed in the Church both on earth and in heaven, Mary is their superior; she is their Queen. During the years following the Ascension of our Savior she was also, indeed, their Evangelist. The account of the Annunciation and the Incarnation and most of the facts relating to the infancy of Jesus as they are recorded by St. Luke could have come only from her. There was no one who could speak to them as she did about the hidden life, the mystery of the cross, and what took place in the soul of Jesus on the cross. This thought moved St. Ambrose to say, "It is not strange that St. John should have spoken better of the mystery of the Incarnation than the others, since he lived at the source of heavenly secrets."

As it was Mary's mission to be the "Evangelist of the Evangelists" and the "Apostle of the Apostles" in the early Church, this is still her mission today with regard to us. We are successors to the Apostles in the sense that our work also is to manifest Christ to the world. This is a supernatural task to be achieved only by supernatural means; and if we are to succeed in it we must, as the Apostles did, depend on Mary. To her we must look for direction in the most difficult task of our apostolate, that of forming ourselves to a completely supernatural spirit. We cannot be true Christians unless we are children of Mary. In her school, at her feet, we must learn to know Jesus. We must see Him through her eyes, follow His movements with her loving attention, tend Him in others with her hands and under her guidance. Above all, we must ponder His mysteries in our hearts in union with her, so that day by day we may deepen our insight into the spirit of her Son. Then, if, like the Apostles, we accustom ourselves to see Jesus living in Mary, there will flow from us, when the time comes for us to do the work of God, the

spirit of His holiness, the fullness of His power, the perfection of His ways, the truth of His virtues, and the communication of His mysteries.

O compassionate Mother Mary, Queen of the Apostles, deign to be my guide and strength in the fulfillment of my vocation. Jesus has graciously chosen me to labor in His vineyard, but in order that its fruits may be plentiful, I must be filled with His spirit. This is your mission, O Mary, since you are my Mother. Teach me to find Jesus daily in the duties of my state, in my work, and in the other members of the Mystical Body. Help me to understand that the spirit of the true apostle is, above all, the spirit of prayer and sacrifice. It was through sacrifice that you became the Mother of the Mystical Body and so transmitted the divine life to your children; by this means, too, my zeal will fructify for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

MAY 24

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*Believe . . . in Me*



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“Believe . . . in me” (Jn. 14:1).

Faith in our Savior is both the basis for our relations with him and the first condition of the supernatural life.

O Son of God, inspire in me a more staunch, active, and joyous faith in You.

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In the New Testament faith means the acceptance of the Gospel preached by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Not to accept the Gospel is not to be a Christian. This faith, moreover, is based neither on intuition nor on direct vision. It is

the acceptance of divine testimony—a free acceptance, because we can refuse belief; enlightened, because it rests upon a personal and intimate conviction that God has really spoken; and supernatural, because divine grace is needed to give light to the mind and assistance to the will. In the past God had spoken to man by the prophets; but *last of all in these days*, St. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, [He] *has spoken to us by his Son*. All that our Savior has said, therefore, all that He has done, all that He has revealed, as it is contained in Scripture and taught by the Church demands the assent of our faith. Jesus insistently recommends this faith to us, He frequently praises it in others, He requires it from His disciples under all circumstances from the beginning to the end of His public life.

In this faith which every Christian must possess, Jesus wishes to see certain qualities. It should be a firm, constant, resolute faith, so that we would sacrifice our lives, if necessary, in testimony to our faith in the Son of God, as our Savior Himself was the first to do. Our faith should also be living and active. Whatever the situation in which we find ourselves, or whatever the obstacles in our path, or the decisions we must make, the first question we should ask ourselves, as St. Vincent de Paul was in the habit of doing, is: "What would Christ do in my place?" There is always in the life of Jesus a mystery, an utterance, an action, that tells us what we should do, what course to take. Our Savior never leaves us without an answer, for He Himself said, "*I have given you an example.*"

Again, Jesus desires us to believe in Him with an eager, joyous faith, because we thereby glorify Him as *the author and finisher of faith*. He it was who brought it to earth by His incarnation, who implanted it in our souls by His life

and teaching, sealed it with His blood, and provided for its preservation and spread by the establishment of the Church. We should always find new joy in making an act of faith in the divinity and humanity of Jesus or in some mystery of His life. And, while it gives glory to the Savior, our faith in Him makes us participants in the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge, because the dispensations of the divine will are contained in the deposit of faith, which is the teaching of Christ: *For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts, to give enlightenment concerning the knowledge of the glory of God, shining on the face of Christ Jesus.* We also share in His power and virtue, because living faith in Him makes all things possible. St. Paul calls his own life, so great and fruitful, a life of faith in Jesus Christ: *And the life I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.*

My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, I humbly beseech You to scatter the darkness of my mind and to give me a lively faith, firm hope, and burning love. Grant, O my God, that I may know You well and may do all things in Your light and in conformity with Your holy will.

MAY 25

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## *Take Courage*



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“But take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).  
Both the life of our Savior and His own precept impress upon

us the duty of exercising hope, the second of the theological virtues, and of not ceasing to make acts of this virtue until death.

Lord Jesus, strengthen in me the virtue of hope.

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To believe in anyone we must have confidence in him; and it is to confidence that Jesus exhorted the Apostles in the words: "*Take courage, I have overcome the world.*" The goal of Christian hope is the possession of God in eternal life. Now, our Savior is our God and, consequently, the proper object of our hope. Eternal life, which consists in knowing the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is our heritage only in Christ and by Christ. He, our High Priest, has entered into the sanctuary of heaven before us. *This hope we have*, says St. Paul, *as a sure and firm anchor of the soul, reaching even behind the veil where our forerunner Jesus has entered for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.* The bliss of heaven itself, moreover, is the eternal and blessed presence of Jesus, for in heaven *we shall ever be with the Lord.*

But the possession of God in eternal life is a supernatural aspiration which it is impossible for us to attain without His all-powerful assistance. And so the means to reach the goal become also the object of our hope. These means, too, come to us from the Savior. He said of Himself, "*I am the way. . . . No one comes to the Father but by me.*" Through Him we receive all grace and merit. Without Him we can do nothing. He is our *God-given wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption* and *in everything [we] have been enriched in him.* He is our Advocate with the Father and by His death He is a *propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.* In tempta-

tion, Jesus is our Protector and our Model, for He was *one tried as we are in all things except sin*.

In all suffering and doubt He is our Light and our Support; everywhere we have in Him a faithful Companion and Fellow Wayfarer. And when the time comes for that great and final departure, who remains as the only One who consoles and is able to console us? Is it not our good Master with His sacraments and His grace? It is because of Him that death is not for the Christian as for *others who have no hope*. In Jesus death is a gain, thanks to the resurrection, which, by faith in Him, by the reception of the Eucharist, by His own Resurrection, makes us citizens of heaven. Truly, with His well-beloved Son the Father has given us all things. Let us remain firm, then, in our hope as in our faith; for in Jesus we are not only established in hope, but *we rejoice in hope*, and with St. Paul *we exult in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works out endurance, and endurance tried virtue, and tried virtue hope*. Nor will our hope in Christ be disappointed, *but God commends his charity toward us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us*.

O Jesus, divine Savior, I place all my hope in You; and because of this hope I shall not fear *even though I walk in the dark valley*. You will render to me my heritage and give joy to my soul and body by the eternal contemplation of Your glory. Jesus, who died and rose again and are now seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us, grant that I may hope in You, like Abraham, against all hope. O risen and glorified Savior, be with the Father and the Holy Spirit my confidence and joy here below — that confidence and joy which no man can take away.



*Abide in My Love*



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“Abide in my love” (Jn. 15:9).

If we abide in our Savior by charity, He necessarily abides in us through sanctifying grace; and the fruit of this union is the observance of the great commandment of love, upon which all else depends.

Jesus, my God, grant that I may love You above all things for Your sake alone.

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What is it that our hearts endlessly seek after and desire? It is God, our first and most intimate need. Toward Him, the Source of our being, the Principle of our conservation and of our beatitude, we naturally incline, as the plant turns toward light and moisture. Nothing except God can fully satisfy us; but Jesus is our God, as He solemnly affirmed; “*He who sees me sees also the Father*”; and again, “*I and the Father are one.*” If our Savior is God we belong to Him and we are under the obligation toward Him of the first and greatest commandment, which is to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and all our strength, for His own sake, because of His infinite perfection. This must always be the predominant motive of our love. Other motives, such as holy fear, gratitude, hope, may be joined with it, provided that pure love remains truly predominant. The pure love of God differs from interested love in that by it we love Him because He is *good* and we wish *Him* well, while interested love consists in loving Him inasmuch as He

is *good to us* and in desiring *our own* good. The love of the divine benefactions, however, easily passes to love of the Benefactor, and if this love of His bounty is based on His infinite goodness, it becomes identical with charity.

After God, man is the need and delight of man. This satisfaction, too, which we seek for in our fellow human beings, we find in Jesus; for as He is truly God, so He is also truly Man. We see in Him a human nature like our own, even to being liable to suffering and death, although possessing at the same time an infinite sublimity and containing all excellence, honor, and dignity of nature, grace, and glory. We belong to Him, and we are completely dependent upon Him for our existence, our life, and all our interests, natural and supernatural. We have, so to speak, our roots in Him. Moreover, despite our unworthiness, past and present, Jesus loves us with an active, disinterested, supernatural love as His creatures, His brethren, His coheirs, His friends, as the children of His heavenly Father. No friend could love us more than He, none could be more powerful nor more faithful.

The effects upon us of our growth in divine charity have been well described by the author of the *Imitation*. Our burden becomes light: "For love carrieth a burden without being burdened and maketh all else that is bitter, sweet and savoury." We are lifted upward toward God: "For love is born of God and cannot rest but in God." We aim with joy at the highest perfection: "The lover flieth, runneth, rejoiceth . . . he giveth all for all." Our souls become filled with joy and peace; joy, because "nothing is sweeter than love . . . nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven or on earth"; peace, because the love of Jesus gives us "a tranquil heart, great peace, and festive joy."

May the love of Christ our Lord grow in our hearts until we attain to the perfection of charity, without division, without reserve, without measure!

“Lord Jesus, I unite myself to Your perpetual, unceasing, universal sacrifice. I offer myself to You every day of my life, and every moment of every day, according to Your most holy and adorable will. You have been the Victim of my salvation. I wish to be the victim of Your love. Accept my desire, take my offering, graciously hear my prayer. Let me live for love of You, let me die for love of You; let my last heartbeat be an act of perfect love!” (*Raccolta.*)

MAY 27

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### *Members of Christ*



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“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”  
(1 Cor. 6:15.)

We owe to St. Paul the sublime comparison of the Mystical Body of Christ with a living organism of which Jesus is the head, the Holy Spirit the soul, and the Church the body.

Divine Jesus, grant me a better and more practical understanding of my life in You.

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Of all the Fathers St. Augustine studied the marvelous doctrine of the mystical Christ with the greatest love and insight. He points out that Jesus is presented in Holy Scripture under three distinct aspects. We see Him, first, as the only-begotten Son of God, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father; second, as the Incarnate Word, who, by an unspeakable act

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of condescension became man and thus our Brother, our Mediator, and our Redeemer. Finally, there is, in St. Augustine's phrase, *the whole Christ*, who mystically completes Himself by joining to Himself the Church so as to form what St. Paul calls *a perfect man*, of whom He personally is the head and all the faithful are the members. Not that there is anything lacking to Christ, but as the Word could complete Himself in His role as Savior, according to the actual dispensation of Providence, only by assuming our humanity; so, too, the God-Man completes Himself by uniting to Himself the Church. The manner of this union St. Paul symbolizes by Christian marriage and by the union which exists between the members of a living organism and its head.

The members of Christ have no other spiritual life than that which they draw from their Head, just as the life of the branches is derived from the vine to which they are united so as to form one and the same plant. "*Abide in me,*" Jesus tells us, "*and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.*" We abide in Jesus by the exercise of faith, by corresponding with His graces, and by reproducing His virtues in our own lives. We live by Him and He in us when, having renounced sin, we die to ourselves as the seed which falls into the ground must die before it can yield fruit. When we no longer act except in accordance with the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then the divine life of Jesus has come to birth in our souls. And when the new man, Jesus Christ, is formed in us, His desires, His words, His actions, in a word, His whole life is lived again in us according to our vocation and in the measure of our capacity.

Then we can say with the Apostle of the Gentiles, *It is*

*now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me; that is, if I speak, I speak through His power; if I pray, it is owing to His grace; all I accomplish is done through Him. This mystical life of Jesus, which consists in thinking, loving, speaking, and acting as He did, makes the perfect Christian, a living continuation of Christ in the human family. It is only in becoming one with Jesus, united with Him as the branch is joined to the vine, that we can be pleasing to the Father. It has been truly said that in all the universe God the Father loves with the true love of friendship only Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of the Father's love and complacency and through Him alone can we be beautiful in the Father's eyes.*

O Jesus, let me no longer be led by the humors and whims of nature which so often motivate and govern my actions; when I speak or act, when I pray, labor, or suffer, let it be in You that I do these things. Through the intercession of Your blessed Mother, I beg You to teach me how to die to myself that I may live in You, with You, and by You. Show me what in me is displeasing to You and prepare me to receive the graces that You mercifully will to give me. Above all, good Jesus, never permit me to stand in the way of the graces which through me You will to bestow upon others.

MAY 28

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### *Imitation of Christ*



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“But be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man, which has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24).

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The imitation of Christ is more than a counsel or a recommendation; it is a duty.

O Jesus, enlighten my understanding and move my will that I may efficaciously desire to imitate You.

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The Eternal Son of God did not become incarnate solely for the purpose of reconciling the world with His Father and delivering mankind from the bondage of Satan. This was only a part of His mission. A principal end of the Incarnation was to provide man with a Teacher, a Master and Model, of all virtues. Jesus shows us this by calling Himself the *Way* by which we must live, that is, according to His example; as well as the *Truth* (by His doctrine) and the *Life* (by His death and His sacraments). During the thirty-three years of His mortal life our Savior endeavored by precept and example to reproduce His virtues in His own disciples and through them in the souls of all men. Therefore, He willed to pass through all the stages of human life: to be born, to labor, to suffer and die, like all the children of Adam.

If the title "Christian" means "follower of Christ," and if the Savior came to be for us a rule of conduct as well as of faith, then we cannot be true Christians without imitating His virtues. His life is a mirror wherein each of us can see traced out the pattern our own life should follow. Jesus says to all, "*If anyone wishes to come after me, let him . . . follow me*" and "*I have given you an example, that as I have done . . . so you also should do.*" St. Paul teaches us that in becoming Christians we became adopted children of God by grace as Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, is by nature. Ought we not resemble our heavenly Father as children in the natural order resemble their fathers? But since

God Himself is invisible, we can achieve this resemblance only by conforming ourselves to His image as it was visibly revealed in His Son. Just as we received from Adam the germ of our physical life, which, as it develops, takes us through the stages of human existence until we reach maturity like that of our first parent, so we receive in Baptism a principle of supernatural life which should grow and strengthen until Jesus Christ is formed in us. Furthermore, our happiness in both time and eternity depends upon our likeness to Jesus Christ. In this life we cannot become the object of the divine love and complacency unless the Father sees the image of His adorable Son being formed in us; and in heaven our happiness will be in accordance with the degree of conformity with Jesus Christ that we achieved during life. Let us see whether we are becoming living copies of our divine Model; whether our eyes are pure, our ears chaste, our words discreet, our comportment modest and grave like His. Let us see whether we are replacing our natural eagerness for notice with His humility, the coldness and indifference we sometimes show our neighbor with His compassionate charity, our vacillation with His constancy, our moodiness with His equanimity, our ill-regulated affections with His purity of heart, our distracted habits with His recollection, our immoderateness of speech with the temperate wisdom of His discourse.

O Jesus, grant that I may say to You with a sincere and efficacious will, "*Master, I will follow thee wherever thou goest.*" This grace I ask through the most blessed Virgin Mary, Your closest follower, and through Your Apostles, who, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, led lives so faithfully conformed to Yours.

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*Knowledge of Christ*

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“Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn. 17:3).

According to the words of our Savior Himself in His prayer for His disciples at the Last Supper, everlasting life consists in the knowledge of Him.

Divine Savior, teach me to know You and to make You everywhere better known and loved.

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We cannot imitate that which we do not know; and so, if we are to follow Jesus, it is necessary for us to come to know Him. To know Jesus is to become acquainted with all that faith teaches us about Him and about His relations with us. It is to possess in detail a knowledge of all the events of His life, from His birth to His ascension into heaven; but not in a merely speculative way, for this of itself does not move the will. We have long known Jesus in the sense that we are familiar with the history of His life on earth. Perhaps, because of reading and hearing about these events so frequently, we have become somewhat insensible to their import for us. Yet, if we are to imitate Him, we may not be satisfied with the superficial knowledge of Him that all Christians possess; we must study His life in a deeper and more detailed way. The purpose of this closer attention to the life of our Savior on earth is that we may be filled with the spirit of His doctrine and example in the



sense of the words of St. Paul: *Wherefore I . . . do not cease to give thanks to you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in deep knowledge of him.*

The principal means that has been provided us for growing in the knowledge of Jesus is the Gospel. Its lessons should be deeply impressed upon our minds, for the least word of Jesus Christ is light for the soul and the source of its life and peace. By a reverent and humble study of His life as it is narrated by the Evangelists, we shall be enabled to enter ever more deeply into the mysteries of Christ. Then we shall advance in the imitation of Him whom we must resemble under pain of not being recognized by Him when we appear before His tribunal. We shall be filled with zeal to make others know and love our divine Master, and we shall bring this about more by our example than by our instruction. His virtues will become living and real to us; His teachings, intimately familiar lessons; the thought of Him, sweet and habitual. But in order to gain this true knowledge we must pray as well as study. For all is supernatural that Jesus teaches by word and example. All is above our natural lights and also against the inclinations of our fallen nature. We can understand and follow our Savior's teachings, therefore, only insofar as we are assisted by grace.

The contemplation of the hidden and public life of the Savior should lead us also to the study of another book, open to all eyes, where the greatest saints have been formed—the crucifix. Take into your hand this glorious Standard after which your Congregation is named and say to yourself, "Who is it who hangs dying here in anguish? It is Jesus Christ, my God and my Savior. And why does He suffer? For love

of me and it is I who have crucified Him." Work to become perfect copies of your divine Model and nothing will be able to destroy your vocation. The crosses you will meet in fulfilling your duties will appear bearable, to be loved, and even preferable to everything else, because Jesus preferred the cross. "Divine Savior, I desire ardently to meditate upon Thy holy books. Make Thy words my chaste delight; deign to grant me understanding of them. Reveal Thyself to my soul and allow me to drink continuously of the salutary waters of Thy grace" (prayer of St. Augustine).

MAY 30

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### *Our Lady in the Cenacle*



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"All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14).

Represent to yourself the upper room and the Apostles and disciples in prayer, gathered about our Lady.

O Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, be to me counselor and guide, as you were to the Apostles.

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As we return in thought to the Cenacle, that sanctuary of recollectedness and peace, where the Apostles and disciples are assembled, persevering *steadfastly in prayer*, the first impulse of our hearts is to look for Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Peter will on Pentecost receive general jurisdiction over the Church as the earthly representative of our Savior, while Mary will remain in the ranks of the faithful; but it is no

less true that in the upper room, as in the infant Church, Mary played a unique role. The Apostles had known the Lord for a few years only, that is, since the baptism of John. They recognized and acknowledged His divinity, but it would seem that they had not yet been fully instructed in certain fundamental mysteries of Christianity, as, for example, the Incarnation. This was Mary's secret. She had not revealed it even to St. Joseph, for, as we know, he was told of it by an angel; and it was the Holy Spirit, not Mary, who first disclosed the secret to Elizabeth. But that which the humility of Mary had hitherto concealed, it was now time to speak of, and it may have been during these days of prayer in the Cenacle that Mary, the witness of all the mysteries of the Christian faith, spoke of them to the Apostles and disciples.

Mary was not only the instructor, but also the counselor and guide of the Apostles, awed as they were by the enormity of the task which confronted them. She told them, perhaps, how one day an angel came and asked of her also the impossible, reminding her that *nothing shall be impossible with God*. She exhorted them to have confidence, to pray. During these days of intimacy the Apostles, we might say, "discover" Mary. They no longer feel they are alone, for they recognize that in Mary God had given them a source of comfort and strength. But even more than by her words Mary supported the Apostles and disciples by her example. What fortitude of soul was hers! What goodness to those who had abandoned Jesus! The sight of her alone must have lifted up their hearts. She was the model of all the virtues that Jesus had Himself practiced and taught. They had only to observe her to know what they should be.

Mary also prayed with and for this little band of Jesus'

followers. Incessantly she implored the Holy Spirit to descend upon their souls, still so blind and powerless. Mary's presence in the Cenacle during these hours preceding the descent of the Spirit of God was necessary for the Church; for it was through her intercession that the Paraclete hastened His coming. It is right that at this moment we should find the Church, as she will always be found, gathered about Mary, drawing inspiration from Mary, modeling herself upon Mary, and supplicating her to obtain from her Son the promised grace. Mary also will continue to sustain her role. It is by her intercession that the members of the Church down the ages will receive grace from the Holy Spirit; it is to Mary we must have recourse if we wish to obtain it.

Hail Mary, our Mother, on the eve of the first Pentecost more than ever *full of grace*, dearest and worthiest of all who awaited the coming of the Paraclete! Deign in your gracious mercy to intercede for me and prepare me for the descent of the Holy Spirit, who reigned so perfectly in your pure soul.

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MAY 31

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*Pentecost*



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“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4).

In celebrating the feast of Pentecost, we honor a mystery that is daily renewed; for the Paraclete still really descends into souls that are properly disposed to receive Him; not in a visible form as upon the Apostles, but just as truly. Nor does He now usually bring with Him the external gifts that were necessary in apostolic times, but graces of conversion and sanctification

which are and will ever be the same as those that accompanied His first coming.

Divine Paraclete, grant me as the grace of this feast that I may be interiorly enlightened and purified as were the Apostles and disciples.

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What were the Apostles before the descent of the Paraclete? Men drawn from the lower social classes, without education, and not even endowed with great intelligence. After three years in the school of a divine Master they still did not understand His doctrine and they still held to a false interpretation of His promises. But, immediately upon receiving the Holy Spirit of God, the truths of faith, the significance of the teachings of Jesus suddenly became clear. Without study on their part or formal instruction, they now understood the whole deposit of faith: dogmas, moral doctrines, the sacramental system. Many of the saints, also, have told us that they learned more in prayer than from books or other human instruction. Have recourse, then, to the Holy Spirit, and without neglecting natural means for advancing in knowledge, acquire the habit of invoking Him in your studies. Ask also that He Himself may speak to you in your meditations and spiritual reading and in the spiritual conferences you attend.

The instruction that the Apostles miraculously received from the Holy Spirit was not for them sterile knowledge. While they were being enlightened, they were also being interiorly purified; for the Paraclete is the Sanctifier as well as the Spirit of Truth, and under the symbol of the tongues of fire He infused divine charity into their hearts. Before, the Apostles had been ambitious, jealous, quarrelsome, but now they are transformed. Not only are they saints, but

they are models of high sanctity. In the world, but no longer of the world, transcending every earthly interest and desire, they can say to the whole human race with St. Paul, "Be imitators of us as we are of Christ." The same transformation could be brought about in us if we knew how to draw down the Holy Spirit. His sacred fire, once really enkindled in our hearts, would destroy every irregular desire, all sensual affection; it would consume all the impurity in our soul, so that we should become pure gold.

The coming of the Paraclete also caused the Apostles to rise above all human fear. These men who had been so lacking in courage that they abandoned their Master—the most zealous among them had three times denied Him—now go forth to preach His Resurrection, to proclaim His divinity, to spread His Gospel in synagogue, Temple, and public street, and even before the tribunals of their persecutors. Not only are they fearless in exposing themselves to suffering and death for their Lord and Master, but they even aspire to a share in His lot. They look forward to dying for Him as to a high and blessed privilege. How great is our own deed of fortitude and courage—not, perhaps, in order to face martyrdom, but to win the victory over the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the wiles of the devil!

O Holy Spirit of God, I am as ignorant, as defiled by sin, and as weak as the Apostles and disciples were before Your descent on the first Christian Pentecost. Impart to me also the light, the purity of conscience, and the strength of soul which Your coming brought to them.

JUNE-JULY-AUGUST





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*The Pentecostal Fire*

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“And there appeared to them parted tongues as of fire, which settled upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign tongues, even as the Holy Spirit prompted them to speak” (Acts 2:3, 4).

See the flames in the form of parted tongues resting over the heads of Mary and the Apostles and disciples.

O Holy Spirit, bestow upon me power to teach and a love of God and my neighbor that will give life and efficacy to my teaching.

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By His Pentecostal gift of tongues, the Spirit of Love annulled the division which had begun at the building of the tower of Babel, and men were again made one in the language of the Word. It was fitting that the conquest of the nations by the Word should begin with a miracle whereby the word of truth would gather all peoples into the one family of the faith by being simultaneously intelligible to all. With this same end in view the Church during the ages of faith united the nations by a common language, the Latin tongue, which, until the great heresy of the sixteenth century, was the universal bond of communication between civilized countries.

On that first Christian Pentecost, Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims who had flocked thither from every Gentile land where Israel had founded a synagogue, in order to keep the feasts of the Pasch and the Jewish Pentecost. Attracted

by the sound of the *violent wind* and impelled also by the power of the Spirit, a large crowd gathered around the house which contained the infant Church of Jesus Christ. We may imagine how the curiosity of these *devout men from every nation under heaven* turned to astonishment when they heard the Apostles, unlettered Galileans, awkward hitherto even in the use of their native tongue, addressing them with extraordinary power in a language that each of them heard as his own.

Here was the symbol of unity in its perfection! Here were the heralds of the one true faith of Jesus Christ! Peter, the Vicar of Christ, his face glowing with enthusiasm; Andrew, already filled with the ardent love of the cross which would be his great characteristic; John, the future prophet of Patmos, his eyes shining with the fire of inspiration; James his brother, the son of thunder, who was to be the first of the Apostles to gain the crown of martyrdom; Thomas, the future Apostle of India; Matthew, the first of the Evangelists; Bartholomew, who would preach the Gospel in Armenia; Matthias, destined to be crucified like his divine Master; Philip, who would evangelize Phrygia; James, called the Lesser, who would be the first bishop of Jerusalem; Simon and Jude, who were to be martyred together in Persia.\*

The crowd, struck with amazement, said to one another, "*Behold, are not all these that are speaking Galileans? And how have we heard each his own language in which he was born?*" But even this most striking miracle found its skeptics, for *others said in mockery, "They are full of new wine."* This rude derision, by contrast, only emphasized the grandeur of

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\* Our knowledge of the Apostles' respective missions and manner of death rests almost entirely upon tradition.

the scene. It was evident to all who were in good faith that these men had been transformed, that they were possessed of a new and supernatural power; consequently, *there were added that day about three thousand souls*. O blessed Pentecostal Fire of eloquence and zeal! Let us ask the Holy Spirit to impart it also to us.

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

To Thee, the Comforter, we cry,  
To Thee, the Gift of God most high,  
The Fount of life, the Fire of love,  
The soul's Anointing from above.

The sevenfold gifts of grace are Thine,  
O Finger of the Hand divine;  
True promise of the Father Thou,  
Who dost the tongue with speech endow.

Thy light to every thought impart,  
And shed Thy love in every heart;  
Our body's poor infirmity  
With strength perpetual fortify.

JUNE 2

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*The Discourse of St. Peter*



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“But Peter, standing up with the Eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke out to them” (Acts 2:14).

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See Peter, the Rock upon which the Church was built, speaking to the crowd under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

O God, instill in me a true filial devotion to the Supreme Pontiff and the Holy See.

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Indignant at the mocking charge that they spoke under the influence of wine, Peter, standing in the midst of the Eleven, addressed the crowd. Peter, who had not known how to answer a servant girl, now spoke with supreme authority. *"Men of Judea,"* he began, *"and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. These men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days,' says the Lord, 'that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh. . . .' Men of Israel,"* continued Peter, *"hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did through him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know. Him, when delivered up by the settled purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have crucified and slain by the hands of wicked men. . . . This Jesus God has raised up, and we are all witnesses of it. Therefore, exalted by the right hand of God, and receiving from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this Spirit which you see and hear."*

Simon, the son of Jona, could not of himself have spoken with this knowledge, this authority, this air of command. He, the former fisherman of Genesareth, gives orders to the Synagogue; he charges it publicly with deicide and proclaims the sovereignty of Jesus over the house of Israel: *"Let all the house of Israel know most assuredly that God has*

*made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* The Holy Spirit who inspired St. Peter also touched the hearts of his hearers, so that *they were pierced to the heart*, St. Luke tells us, *and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"* And Peter replied, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise and to your children and to all who are far off, even to all whom the Lord our God calls."* St. Luke continues, *And with very many other words he bore witness and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation."* Those who believed were then baptized and on the evening of that happy day of Pentecost the Church had been increased by three thousand souls. Our Savior had not deceived His followers; already they were His witnesses in Jerusalem, and soon they would bear testimony to Him *in the uttermost parts of the earth.*

My God, I thank You for making me a child of the Church, which is and ever will be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Strengthen, I beseech You, my filial allegiance to the Sovereign Pontiff and grant me a living faith and loyalty to the Church, the pillar and ground of faith, that I may steadfastly hold her doctrines, maintain her cause, and defend her rights.

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*Christian Unity*

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“And all who believed were together and held all things in common” (Acts 2:44).

The first Christian community was united by that bond of union which is the gift of the Spirit of Love.

O Holy Spirit of God, inspire in me a strong realization of my union with the other members of the household of the faith.

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The first Christian community possessed their goods in common; the proceeds from the sale of their lands and other property were shared with their brethren. *The multitude of believers*, writes St. Luke, *were of one heart and one soul, and not one of them said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.* The prayer of the Savior had been answered: they were *one*, and because they were one they were happy and strong. St. Luke tells us also that they daily assembled in the temple and then, *breaking bread in their houses, they took their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and being in favor with all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their company such as were to be saved.* From the very beginning, the Church bore her distinctive marks: unity, even to the common possession of goods, freely and spontaneously agreed to by all; holiness, produced by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and maintained by prayer and the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread; growing universality and submission to the authority of the Apostles. Moreover, the primitive Church,

still untouched by heresy, was animated by a charity which it was not to know again in the same degree. This was the golden age, when the least counsels of the Savior were taken according to the letter.

The spirit of these early Christians should be our spirit. The Church is the house of God in which dwells the family of Christ, nourished by the same Bread, cared for and directed by a common Father. And it was because the members of the Church were to live one and the same life under one and the same head that the Twelve remained so long in Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit, gathered about Peter, their guide and the keystone, as it were, of the edifice of the Church. According to an ancient tradition, they did not leave the soil of Palestine for twelve years, teaching, as our Lord had commanded, first of all in Jerusalem, then in all of Judea and Samaria. Together they preached along the temple colonnades, together they ordained deacons and conferred the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands, together, but always in subordination to Peter, they governed the infant Church.

All we who are the younger brethren of these early Christians should be recognized by the same characteristic love for unity. Against a united Church enemies are impotent; their blows only tighten the bonds of union. We should possess the same catholic largeness of heart. There should be no exclusiveness, no barriers. We should imitate also their docility and filial submission to the successors of the Apostles; for we are *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner stone*. And our lives, like theirs, should be characterized by holiness; for the society founded by Christ has the sole aim of sanctifying its members and the Church will

continue her militant life on earth until the number of the elect whom she will have sanctified is complete.

“O good Jesus, Author of our faith, preserve it pure within us; keep us safe in the bark of Peter, faithful and obedient to his successor and Thy Vicar here on earth, that so the unity of holy Church may be maintained, holiness fostered, the Holy See protected in freedom, and the Church universal extended to the benefit of souls. O Jesus, Author of our faith, humble and convert the enemies of Thy Church; grant true peace and concord to all Christian kings and princes and to all believers; strengthen and preserve us in Thy holy service, to the end that we may live in Thee and die in Thee. O Jesus, Author of our faith, let me live for Thee and die for Thee” (from a prayer by St. Clement Hofbauer).

JUNE 4

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### *Religious Union*



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“I pray . . . that all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us” (Jn. 17:20, 21).

In this prayer to His Father for the Apostles, our Savior reveals the mystery of spiritual union. If the bond of brotherly love should unite all Christians, it should be especially evident in a religious community, whose members have vowed to imitate Christ even more perfectly than the other members of the Mystical Body are bound to do.

O divine Savior, grant me the grace of habitually promoting union in my community by my words and actions.

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God is the founder and builder of every religious community. No matter how gifted its human founder may be or how fervent and apostolic its pioneers, God carries the work to its completion. If the work fail, it is always because the members fail in the constant effort to live the religious life perfectly. What are the qualities of a perfect religious life? It is a life led in common, submissive, regular, interior, edifying, laborious, motivated by a pure intention. It makes us aspire only to the happiness of possessing Jesus and of belonging only to Him and to His Blessed Mother. It makes us devote all our goods and gifts only to the honor of our divine Master and the salvation of souls. It makes us exactly obedient by a constant and universal fidelity to the Rules and Constitutions of our community; fidelity that is inspired by love, not fear; by faith, not human expediency. It unites us to one another by humility, meekness, and charity, so that the advice of the author of the *Imitation*, "mutually supporting, consoling, aiding, instructing, and admonishing one another," is carried out to the letter. It is a life in every sense hidden with Jesus in God.

Regardless of difference in employments, a common zeal for the glory of God in the leading of a perfect religious life will bring about a union of hearts. In a great work of charity, as in the erection of a large building, one person alone does not accomplish the work, nor does a single beam of wood or a single stone construct the edifice. On the contrary, the various workmen make their separate contributions, each stone is cut to fit into its proper place, and each piece of timber is so laid that it may add to the beauty and strength of the finished building. With us, likewise, united effort is the indispensable means for achieving our aim which is the salvation and sanctification of souls.

There should be but one mind and one heart among all the members of the community. Between the highest authority and the members should be union such as that which exists between Christ and His Mystical Body, between the Head of the Church and the faithful. A holy and intimate bond of peace and concord should unite the Superiors to the Superior General, the members of the community to their local Superiors and to one another, and all alike should be united to God through Jesus Christ and to Jesus Christ through Mary and Joseph. My dearly beloved, pray for your Superiors; pray especially for her who bears the burden of the general administration, and give to all your Superiors unquestioning loyalty and unfaltering support. Love one another, help one another, pray for one another. Remember that you are to be known as followers of Christ by this sign: "See how they love one another!"

O good Jesus, unite us all by that interior and exterior bond of fraternal union which characterized the early Christians. Let not the cold ashes of pride, envy, ambition, and intolerance smother among us the flames of fraternal charity. Help us to tighten the cord binding together the works of our community, so that Your grace and blessing may flow down upon us, and that the world, upon beholding the fruits of our union, may give glory to You, the Author of our vocation.

*The Fruits of the Holy Spirit*



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“But the fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, modesty, continency. Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-24).

The fruits of the Spirit are those works which the Holy Spirit generates and brings forth in us by His grace and through which we merit and obtain the kingdom of God. St. Paul uses the singular, *fruit*, to show that all the works of the Spirit, that is, the life of grace, are manifestations of charity.

O Holy Spirit, help me to obey faithfully Your inspirations that I may bring forth Your fruits.

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The fruits of the Spirit are distinct from the Gifts. They are the ripe and full product of the Vine which is Christ, of the three great theological virtues and the Gifts exercised together. The virtues and the Gifts are as the branches and sanctifying grace is the trunk and the sap of the tree of our spiritual life. Actual grace is the light and heat which cause the virtues to ripen into acts. St. Paul's enumeration of these fruits of the Spirit, that is, of the good works pleasing to God accomplished in us and by us through the help of the Holy Spirit, is not arbitrary; it admirably indicates the progress of the reign of the Holy Spirit in the soul. The first fruit of the Spirit is charity and according to our progress in charity is to be measured the extension of the reign of the Holy Spirit within us. As there can be no grace without charity, so there can be no Gifts and no Fruits which do not stem from the love of God and neighbor.

From charity joy is born, the result of possessing the God we love. This joy will always be relative here below, because on earth we shall never possess God according to our desires; yet it will become an ever greater and more living joy as we come to love God more exclusively. Joy brings peace, which itself supposes that the soul is untroubled by any enemy in the possession of God and that it does not seek rest in anything except Him. Adversities are not feared because the soul directed by the Holy Spirit knows how to suffer patiently. Then, St. Paul passes on to the moral virtues, naming first those which relate to our neighbor: patience and kindness. From these two virtues, there flow to our neighbor help and blessing. They change our hard, indifferent ways to courtesy and interest in speech and conduct. They cause us to render to our neighbor not evil for evil, but good for evil.

By faith the Apostle means, according to St. Ambrose, loyalty and reliability as opposed to deceit and falsehood. St. Paul may also be referring here to that simplicity of heart by which one is inclined to give credence to one's neighbor, unless prudence counsels otherwise; in other words, like charity, faith *believes all things*. Furthermore, the just man is not only patient, kind, faithful with regard to his neighbor, but he is also master of himself; that is, he is modest and continent. Modesty and continency impose temperance and restraint upon our words and actions. They are acquired by the mastery and restraint of the inner man and are shown exteriorly in well-ordered conduct. These virtues are particularly necessary to religious consecrated to God, so that they may become instruments of grace and divine blessing. St. Paul closes his list of the fruits of the Spirit with the words, *Against such things there is no law*; that is, they

who live no more according to the flesh live, by the power of the Spirit, a life in Christ, wholly and entirely for God.

“O Holy Spirit, divine Spirit of light and love, I consecrate to You my understanding, my heart, and my will, my whole being for time and for eternity. May my understanding be always submissive to Your heavenly inspirations and to the teachings of the holy Catholic Church, of which You are the infallible Guide; may my heart be ever inflamed with love of God and my neighbor; may my will be ever conformed to the divine will, and my whole life a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and You be honor and glory forever” (*Raccolta*).

JUNE 6

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### *Our Lady, Spouse of the Holy Spirit*



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“He created her in the Holy Ghost, and saw her, and numbered her, and measured her” (Ecclus. 1:9).

Mary is the sealed fountain of God; only He can estimate the value and extent of the graces that are enclosed within her soul.

Our Lady of Light, Spouse of the Holy Ghost, obtain for me your dispositions of full response to the operations of divine grace.

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When the angel greeted Mary as *full of grace*, she was inundated with the divine life — not in the sense that nothing more could now be added, but in the sense that there had never been an instant in her life up to that moment when she had not complied perfectly with the divine will. Never

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had there been a pause in the enlargement of her capacity to receive further outpourings of the divine life. Every grace that a creature can receive she received to the full. Mary's whole being was vibrant with the divine life of sanctifying grace. "Mary is rightly represented as clothed with the sun," says St. Bernard, "for she has penetrated into the profound abyss of divine Wisdom more deeply than we can think or comprehend; to such an extent, indeed, that she seems to have become immersed in that inaccessible light as far as it is possible for a creature who does not have personal union with God." The Holy Spirit communicated Himself to Mary for the first time in the home of her parents, St. Joachim and St. Ann, at the moment of her Immaculate Conception. The second great outpouring of grace came on the day of the Annunciation; and at Pentecost, when again Mary was in prayerful seclusion, the Holy Spirit infused into her soul for a third time the infinite riches of His grace.

We also have received the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us, body and soul. His work in us is the same as it was in Mary, namely, to form Jesus in us and through us to give Him to others; but He does this through Mary. Whenever Christ is born mystically in a soul, He is born as He was at the time of His incarnation — of the Holy Spirit through Mary. The common work of our Lady and her divine Spouse is the formation of the Mystical Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit shows her God's designs concerning each of Christ's members, the state and dispositions of their souls, the degree of glory each is to attain, their dangers and the graces they need. This is implicit in the doctrine that no grace is given to any soul without Mary's mediation. It is she who draws the Holy Spirit into our souls. "When the Holy Ghost finds Mary in a soul," says St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort,

“He flies thither, He enters fully, He communicates Himself abundantly to that soul, insofar as it makes room for His Spouse.”

If the accomplishment of the aim of our spiritual life, which is sanctity, has been entrusted by God to Mary, if He gives nothing to earth without causing the gift to pass through her hands, if she holds the threads of all the events bearing upon our salvation, should we not place ourselves completely under her guidance and so reach the perfection of abandonment to God through abandonment to Mary? To abandon means more than the surrender of self, it means forgetting self, putting self aside. Abandonment to Mary means not only placing all that is ours in her hands, but also turning our eyes away from ourselves and keeping them fixed on her. We should live “with her” by taking her as the model of all we do, live “in her” by making her views and feelings our own, and live “through her” by going to Jesus through her intercession.

“O thou who art both Virgin and Mother! O sacred Temple of the Divinity! O Marvel of heaven and earth! O Mother of God! I am thine by the general right and title of thy greatness, but I wish to be thine also by the special right of my choice and my free will. I give myself to thee and to thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and I wish to pass no day without giving Him and thee some special homage and mark of my dependence and servitude, in which I desire to die and to live forever” (from a prayer of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle).

## *The Most Holy Trinity*



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“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

In the doctrine of the Trinity our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to us a mystery concerning the nature of God which we could not even have suspected by the operation of our natural reason and which elevated our knowledge of God to an infinite degree. Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, grant me dispositions of soul which will gain for me the special graces of this feast.

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Essentially One by nature, God is three divine Persons, coeternal and identical, yet distinct: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Word of the Father existing from all eternity as the perfect expression of the Father's knowledge of Himself. The Spirit proceeds from the simultaneous and reciprocal love which unites the Father and the Son. The Three are One, yet Each is not simply a part of one Whole. The Three together are but one Substance, one Nature, simple, without parts. The Father was not made or created or begotten; the Son was not made or created, but He is eternally begotten by the Father; the Holy Spirit was not made or created or begotten, but He proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son.

Before the mystery of the Trinity the most learned must bow with the unlettered in a submissive act of faith and in humble adoration. Glory to the divine Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without



end! Glory to the Eternal Word, to the only-begotten Son, who without being separated from His Father eternally goes out from Him as the ray from the daystar, and who comes among us to exercise the office of Lawgiver, of Savior, of Pontiff, and of Mediator between heaven and earth! Glory to the fecund and universal Principle; to the incomparable Father, who has adopted us as His children, who has loved us even to delivering His Son to death for us, who calls us to partake of His happiness in the society of the elect!

Our Creator is not only our Sovereign Lord, but our Father—and doubly our Father, since He both gave us our natural life and regenerated us, supernaturally adopting us as His children. The Father adopted us in His Son become incarnate; the Word illumines the darkness of our minds by His light, and the Holy Spirit takes up His dwelling in our souls. Not only has the Trinity impressed Its divine image upon our soul by making it according to Its own divine likeness, but, in the supernatural order, through the Sacrament of Baptism, the whole Trinity takes possession of Its creature. And as the names of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity were pronounced over us in Baptism, so they will be among the last the Church will address to us on earth. “Depart, O Christian soul, out of this miserable world,” her minister will say to us, “in the name of God, the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered and died for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee.” May the Most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, cleanse and hallow the poor temples of our souls in which It deigns to dwell.

“O eternal Trinity, O Godhead, O divine Nature that gavest to the blood of Thy Son so great a price, Thou, O eternal Trinity,

art a bottomless sea into which the more I plunge the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek Thee still. Of Thee it is never possible to say: Enough. The soul that is sated with Thy depths desires Thee yet unceasingly, for it hungers ever after Thee. . . . Thou art the fire that burns ever and is never quenched, the fire that consumes in itself all the self-love of souls, that melts all ice and gives all light. This light is an ocean into which the soul plunges ever more deeply and there finds peace" (prayer of St. Catherine of Siena).

JUNE 8

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### *The Calling of the First Disciples*



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"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (Jn. 1:37).

The two followers of St. John the Baptist who became our Savior's first disciples were Andrew and, probably, John.

O divine Savior, deign to make me an instrument of Your grace in my relations with others.

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Among the contributing causes which brought to Jesus His first followers must surely be mentioned the testimony which St. John the Baptist rendered to Him in the presence of two of his own disciples, when he said, "*Behold the Lamb of God.*" Moreover, our Lord's first disciples were the cause of vocation to one another. Andrew brought Peter to the Lord and Philip, whom Jesus called the following day, brought Nathanael. The principal factor, of course, was divine grace, for it was God who chose these disciples and made the words of the Precursor touch their hearts. Still another and a decisive

element was the coming (certainly by design) of Jesus Himself to the place where John was preaching. His dignity and amiability, the prudence and wisdom with which He adapted His invitation to the character and temperament of those who were to be His disciples, strongly influenced their response to His call.

The two first followers of Jesus, Andrew and, probably, John, approached Him with some timidity. Benevolently and graciously, Jesus turned to them and asked, "*What seek you?*"; then He invited them to go with Him, and they remained in His company for the rest of the day. So winning was the charm of His conversation and the sweetness of His welcome that the Evangelist St. John recording the incident in his old age, still recalls the time when the meeting took place: *It was about the tenth hour*, he says; it is this detail in St. John's narrative that leads us to suppose he was Andrew's companion. As for Andrew, his words to his brother Simon, "*We have found the Messias*," sufficiently indicate the profound impression left upon him by his first interview with the Master. And so, by affability and sweetness of manner, Jesus attaches to Himself these two disciples who are both, but John especially, sensitive to evidences of friendship and affection.

Peter was brought to our Savior by his brother Andrew, and how was he received? Peter's interest and expectation had already been aroused by Andrew's announcement that he had found the Messias. This was the most exciting news that could come to a believing Israelite. And Jesus, in turn, knew the way to Simon's heart. *Looking upon him*, Jesus called him by name and immediately declared that in future he would be called Cephas (i.e., Peter), hinting thereby at a great destiny. In Scripture a change of name indicates a call

to a particular vocation and Peter, whose courageous, decisive temperament was not at all insensitive to brilliant prospects, is instantly won. On the morrow, Philip, who appears to have been of a reflective, docile nature, is summoned merely by the words "*Follow me.*" But to Nathanael, upright, exact, cultivated, independent, Philip first gives a precise, documented account of Jesus; and Nathanael, despite his contemptuous reference to Jesus' native village of Nazareth, complies with Philip's suggestion that he meet the Master. Our Savior, on His part, praises Nathanael's integrity and then shows him that He knows of his conversation with Philip. He reveals in addition a circumstance of Nathanael's life known only to Him who reads the heart; thus Jesus allows a ray of His divinity to flash out for the first time, although in a very reserved manner.

O Jesus, *true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world*, how sweet and instructive it is to consider the way in which You accommodated the dispensations of Your grace to the character and dispositions of Your disciples, so that You might win them to Your service! Help me to learn from You how to prepare the way for the operations of Your grace in others and how to be, like Your great Apostle St. Paul, *all things to all men*, that I may gain all for You.

JUNE 9

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### *The Miracle at Cana*



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"Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them to the brim. And Jesus said to them, 'Draw out now, and take to the chief steward'" (Jn. 2:7).

The miracle worked by our Savior at the wedding feast of Cana revealed both His divinity and His great goodness.

O Jesus, grant me a stronger realization of Your love for me.

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The miracle of Cana was a prodigy of the first order. The transformation effected by it was complete and total. By this miracle Jesus showed that He was the Sovereign Lord of creation and possessed the power to do with nature as He pleased. This miracle, furthermore, was not only remarkable in itself, but also in the manner in which it was performed. Our Savior worked the marvel simply, silently, as if accidentally. Nothing in the accomplishment of it strikes the imagination or the senses. Nothing was brought in from outside; Jesus merely used what was at hand. But the circumstances were so managed as to leave no possible doubt of the miracle's authenticity. It was worked in public and in the presence of witnesses whose word would be above suspicion: the servants, the steward, the bridegroom. The stone jars stood in full view; they were used for the customary ablutions and, consequently, had never contained wine before. Moreover, the servants had just filled them to the brim with water. Since this was the *first sign* that Jesus worked to prove the divinity of His mission, it was fitting that it should be both striking and completely protected from all possible suspicion of error or deceit.

Like all the *signs* wrought by Jesus, the miracle of Cana revealed His goodness as well as His power. First of all, He accepted with the most gracious condescension the invitation extended to Him, as to an ordinary friend, by this family of Cana. His acceptance shows also that He did not ignore the customary usages of society; He blessed and sanctified all by His presence. For the consolation and joy

of many married couples He worked this miracle at the foundation of a new family. One might say, also, that it was His way of bidding farewell to family life and of expressing His gratitude for all the happiness He had known in His home at Nazareth. This miracle forms the glorious transition from the hidden life to our Savior's public ministry where a succession of the most striking miracles would be constantly revealing His divinity. The faith of His disciples was marvelously strengthened by this first manifestation of His glory. They had believed in Jesus since their first meeting with Him, when He had revealed His omniscience in the interview with Nathanael. But now, having witnessed one of the *greater things* that He had then promised them, their faith was wonderfully increased. And the confirming of His disciples in their faith was the principal motive of Jesus in working the miracle of Cana.

O Jesus, how could we ever doubt that Your paternal glance is ever upon us, attentive to even the details of our lives, for You know that details are often very important to us! It was Your gracious will that a small household matter should inaugurate the first public manifestation of Your omnipotence. Then, with incredible divine goodness and liberality You gave the *good wine* in vessels filled to the brim, not to satisfy thirst, for it was near the end of the feast, but merely to spare Your hosts embarrassment. How hard our hearts must be and how dull our understanding that we can ever fail to trust Your love for us and to give You all our love in return!

*"They Have No Wine"*



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"They have no wine" (Jn. 2:4).

Picture our Lady interceding with Jesus when the wine fails at the marriage feast of Cana, and thus preparing for the third great manifestation of His glory.

O Mary, my Mother, obtain for me perfect and unfaltering confidence in your intercession.

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*And the wine having run short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."* Among all his recollections St. John was well inspired to choose to relate to us this lovely incident which tells of the power and mercy of Mary. She not only hears our prayers, she anticipates them. She does not wait for us to lay our needs before her, she divines them; and she says to her Son, *"They have no wine"*; that is, *"They have no strength, no virtue."* Furthermore, Mary was the first to notice the awkward situation at the marriage feast. Perhaps she had helped with the preparations and so knew well the extent of the household resources. We can easily imagine our Lady coming to the aid of this family with the same active charity with which she had hastened to the assistance of her cousin Elizabeth after the Annunciation. And now, having observed the failure of the wine, she acted promptly, in order to spare her young hosts embarrassment. This may, indeed, have been her chief purpose in asking for the miracle, so that the faith of His disciples might be strengthened.

Our Savior's answer, "*What wouldst thou have me do, woman? My hour has not yet come,*" is in a sense a refusal, yet not an unqualified one. Jesus, it would seem, did not at this moment wish to perform the miracle His Mother was requesting, but since it was she who asked, He would not refuse. He could not have given stronger testimony of His love and respect for His Mother than by accomplishing a miracle at her request, even though His intention was not, for the moment, to prove His divinity by a public prodigy. "*My hour has not yet come,*" He said; that is, in the counsels of God, apart from the prayer of Mary, this was not the time. But, because Mary had prayed, the hour had come. It is significant and consoling that Jesus should reveal His divine power publicly for the first time by a miracle whose accomplishment depended upon the intercession of Mary. She herself showed her firm confidence that her request had been granted by saying to the servants, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" Mary knew then as she knows now that in her hands is the invisible master key that opens the treasures of the divine bounty. And her words to the servants, the only recorded words that she spoke to men, she addresses also to us in all our needs. "Obey my Son's commandments," she tells us, "and conform your conduct to His, if you wish to receive His favors."

O Mary, you presented the Fruit of your womb to the shepherds. The Magi worshiped Jesus in your arms; and long before the baptism in the Jordan, your gracious salutation had manifested Jesus to His holy Precursor. Then, by the miracle of Cana you gave Him to His people. Turn now toward me, O gracious Advocate, your eyes of mercy, and obtain for me from your Son the grace to do all that He tells me and to follow His example in all things.



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*Corpus Christi*

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“This is my body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19).

In the Eucharist our Savior continues His essential action: the immolation of Himself for the glory of the Father and for our salvation; and He also achieves the end for which the Eucharist was instituted, namely, that we might keep an imperishable remembrance of Him.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace of honoring in a fitting manner Your presence in the Holy Eucharist.

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On Holy Thursday the Church celebrated in sorrow the institution of the Holy Eucharist; Calvary was too near to allow her to lay aside her grief. Today, however, she celebrates this great mystery with splendor and exultation, rejoicing particularly in the glory that is given to God by this sacrament. If at the first appearance of Jesus in this world the angels proclaimed with heavenly joy the glory given to the divine Majesty by the Incarnation of the Word, how immeasurably greater must be the glory He receives from the Eucharist! This is owing, first, to the very nature of the sacrament, in that it is a composite of stupendous marvels. A second excellence of the Eucharist is the character of sacrifice which belongs to it. God is glorified by nothing so much as by sacrifice, and especially by the sacrifice offered in the state of mystical death to which Jesus is reduced in His act of immolation.

Third, great glory is rendered to the Father by the miracu-

lous multiplication in time and space of the Savior and His sacrifice. The Crib was found only in Bethlehem; Calvary alone witnessed the raising of the cross. But now, everywhere, at every moment, God beholds His only-begotten Son adoring Him and immolating Himself upon innumerable altars and in countless tabernacles. The glory and excellence of the Incarnation now covers the whole earth. And this abiding presence of Jesus draws from earth heavenward powerful waves of homage to delight the city of God. These are the days which the prophets foresaw. *In that day, said Isaias, the bud of the Lord shall be in magnificence and glory, and the fruit of the earth shall be high.*

The Incarnate Word is also glorified by the Eucharist in that all Its graces are received through the sacred humanity of our Redeemer Himself. He instituted this sacrament that we might not forget Him; how could we forget One who makes Himself our food, who becomes our very life? By the manifold action of the Eucharist, Jesus forces Himself upon our faith, as it were; He pervades our whole spiritual life; He enters into our very hearts. It is to Jesus in the Eucharist that we go with our faith and our love, our needs and our gratitude. To the Eucharist we bring our humble offerings of reparation for the humiliations and sufferings of our Savior's life and death. Jesus has gained His end: the adoration of the Eucharist is practiced all over the world; the richest treasures, the most exquisite art, the highest and most ingenious expressions of our love are all centered about our altars and our tabernacles. In a manner, the honor given by the Church to Jesus in His Eucharistic life, serves as compensation for the obscurity of His mortal life on earth.

O Jesus, our Emmanuel, I adore You profoundly in the Holy Eucharist and I thank You for this unspeakable divine Gift,

the greatest that even You could give us. At any moment, at every moment, I can go to You. I can never be left entirely alone nor abandoned, because You are always near me. In the Eucharist I possess a treasure so great that I can satisfy for all that God demands of me, atone for my sins, and offer due praise, honor, and thanksgiving to the divine Majesty. In the Eucharist I find divine aid against temptation and strength for my soul. Little by little, through the love, courage, and joy that flow from It into my soul, It will transform me into You. What would the Church be without You in the Eucharist, O Jesus? As a sky without sun, as earth without water, as a body without a soul!

JUNE 12

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*Devotion to the Eucharist*



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“Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world” (Mt. 28:20).

Jesus is for us not only our Head and our Model; He is also our “present God,” our Emmanuel.

O Jesus, grant me a stronger and more generous devotion to You in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

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The Lord God manifested Himself to His people on Mount Sinai in fire and flashes of lightning. The sound of thunder and a voice filled the people with fear and awe. But Jesus in the Eucharist does not speak to our senses; faith alone draws aside the veil and reveals Him as really present in the little white Host, as really present as when He walked on earth in the villages of Judea and Galilee. We believe in this

adorable mystery; but our faith is not truly strong and living or it would be more apparent in both our interior sentiments and our external conduct when we are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. If Jesus gave the least visible sign of His Eucharistic presence, we should be filled with amazement and fear; and if He would show Himself in His glory and majesty as He will one day appear, when He comes in the clouds of heaven, who would dare remain in His presence with a soul defiled by sin or by affection for sin! Who would be tempted to even an instant's distraction? We would all bow low before Him, filled with holy fear and penitence and love. Let us beg Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to strengthen and enliven our faith.

After faith, the homage of ardent love is eminently due this great mystery of love. When was the love of Jesus more generous, more tender, stronger, more disinterested than in the institution of the Eucharist? *Generous love*: He is God and He shares with us His divinity; He is Man and His Body and Blood are given to us as our food and drink. *Tender love*: tenderness grieves upon being separated from the object of its love; and Jesus, *knowing that his hour had come, to pass out of this world to the Father*, instituted the Holy Eucharist so that He might remain with us. *Strong love*: omnipotence was needed to perform the miracle of the Consecration. *Disinterested love*: What need has He of us and our homage? O impenetrable depths of divine mercy and charity! Truly love could do no more. If we really loved in return, how fervent would be our prayer, how rare and transient our distractions! How much we would have to say to Him!

We should also enter into the sentiments of reparation with which the Church celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi.

Gratitude would urge us to atone insofar as we can for the outrages that were inflicted upon the sacred body of Jesus during His passion, and zeal should prompt us to make amends for the profanations that have been committed against the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Above all, we should endeavor by our fervor and recollection to make reparation for all the irreverences of which we ourselves have been guilty: our distracted reception of Holy Communion, our thoughtlessness and preoccupation during the Holy Sacrifice, our lukewarm visits to the Blessed Sacrament, our negligence in overcoming those faults that keep us from becoming worthy to appear in the presence of Jesus and to receive Him into our hearts.

O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, grant me to cry out with the faith of St. Peter, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!*" Divine Savior in the Eucharist, You are truly and really the Son of God and the Son of Mary. Your body is here which she bore in her womb and carried in her arms, the body which was crucified for me and the blood that was shed for me. Your soul is here, whose virtues and merits are mine through my union with You. Your divinity is here, which imparts to me a divine life and a divine destiny. O Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, I believe! I adore! I love!

JUNE 13

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*Our Lady and the Eucharist*



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"And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (Jn. 19:27).

One reason why our Lady was committed to the care of St. John rather than to the other holy women who stood also at the foot of the cross was that St. John was a priest and could give Mary the Eucharist.

O Mary, give me a share in your dispositions when I assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and receive your Son in Holy Communion.

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After our Savior's ascension into heaven, Mary possessed Him only as all other Christians possess Him — in the Eucharist. Let us picture our Lady assisting at the Holy Mass celebrated by St. John. For her the Mass was a renewal and continuation of the Sacrifice of the Cross in a manner and to a degree which we are quite unable to comprehend. Mary was not a priest, but she had received, says Father Olier, "the plenitude of the priestly spirit." Her dignity was higher than that of an ordained priest, for it was Mary's most pure blood which provided the substance of the sacred body of Priest and Victim for the Sacrifice of the Cross. Certain saints have been privileged on occasion to see Jesus in the celebrant's place at the moment of Consecration, but no saint ever grasped the full meaning of this Act as Mary did. She realized more clearly than anyone that the soul of every Mass is the voluntary oblation that her Son made of Himself to the Father for our redemption. As at the foot of the cross she had united herself to His oblation as universal Co-Redemptrix, so she continued this total offering of herself at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in a spirit of adoration, thanksgiving, atonement, and petition. She prayed for sinners, for the Apostles, for the advancement of her Son's kingdom on earth.

As for our Lady's Communions, we can only attempt rever-

ently to form an idea of the hunger, the strong, living desire that drew Mary to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. An early Christian tradition mentions a special feast to commemorate the First Communion Day of the Blessed Virgin. Her reception of the Eucharist was unique, its fruitfulness incomparably surpassing that possible to any other creature. We should try in vain to estimate the benefit our Lady received from each Eucharistic contact with her Son. Our innate desire for God is weakened by the consequences of sin, original and personal, and by our innumerable imperfections; but Mary's soul knew nothing of these impediments. Nothing ever halted for a single moment the grand soaring of her wonderful charity. Her love for the Eucharist was like her love for God — an intense thirst accompanied by a sweet pain which ended only when she died of love.

Each of Mary's Communion surpassed the preceding one in fervor and, by the increase in charity it produced, each Communion disposed her to receive the next with still greater fruit; and the nearer she approached to God the more swiftly she moved toward Him. At every mystical renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, at every Holy Mass, Mary is present, says Gerson, "in spirit, heart, and affection." The sacred body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ, becoming present in the hands of the priest at the words of Consecration, came to us originally through Mary. Would it not be fitting, then, for us to offer Jesus to the Father through Mary at Mass and in Holy Communion to ask for graces through Mary's intercession?

O Mary, Mother of divine grace, deign to associate me in the sacrifice you made to the divine Majesty on the altar of your heart where ceaselessly you offered your beloved Son as a living Host. When I say with the priest at the beginning of the Holy

Mass, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, let me think of your Immaculate Heart so united with the Heart of your Son as to form one Heart, one altar of sacrifice. When I look at the chalice, let me remember that your most pure body was as the first chalice of the blood of Jesus. When I receive Jesus in Holy Communion, give me some share in your dispositions during the nine months preceding His birth, and during those moments after receiving the Eucharist when again you became His pure Tabernacle, O living Tower of Ivory! O House of Gold!

JUNE 14

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*Jesus in the Eucharist*



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“I am the bread that has come down from heaven” (Jn. 6:41). Through the Eucharist our Savior is not only really present in the Church, but He also continues the mysteries of His sacred humanity.

Divine Savior, enable me to enter deeply into the mysteries of Your sacred humanity, especially the mysteries of Your passion and death.

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In the Eucharist as in the Incarnation, Jesus is present at the bidding of a word from virginal lips, He reposes in virginal hands, and, as in the crib, He appears enveloped by the swaddling clothes, as it were, of the sacramental species. The obscurity which conceals from our eyes even the sacred humanity perpetuates the years of the hidden life, as also do the lowly poverty in which He gives Himself to us and His silent, secret action in our souls. Not without good reason, then, does the Church in her Eucharistic Offices and hymns



link repeatedly the mysteries of the Incarnation and Transubstantiation. The Preface of the Mass of Corpus Christi and of the votive Mass of the Blessed Sacrament is that of Christmas; and more than once Jesus has deigned to show Himself in the Eucharist in the lovable guise of a child.

The mysteries of the public life are also mystically renewed in the Eucharist. Our Savior's sacramental presence in so many places, His endless docility in allowing Himself to be carried through our towns and country districts reveal again the tireless Teacher, the Shepherds of souls, who during His public life never wearied of traversing the streets and roads of Palestine, spreading everywhere truth, blessing, comfort, and healing. Again, how many of His parables find their explanation and their most sublime fulfillment in the Eucharist: the parables of the great supper, of the wedding feast, of the banquet ordered by the father of the prodigal after the return of his wayward son! And are not the miracles of the water changed into wine and the multiplication of the loaves continually worked in the Eucharist? Does not Jesus in the Eucharist daily heal throngs of blind, deaf, and mute souls, of paralytics, and of persons possessed and tormented by their undisciplined passions?

As for the relation of the mysteries of our Savior's passion to the Eucharist, this sacrament is essentially a memorial whereby He mysteriously renews His holy passion and death. And, unhappily, the Eucharist also renews the suffering that our Savior did not will or seek for and which brings neither honor to Him nor profit to us. In the hall of the Eucharistic banquet Judases are not wanting, who approach the Body of the Lord with impure hands and who receive Him into a defiled heart. The Eucharistic life of Jesus is, on the side of God, an abyss of miracles and love; but there is at the

same time on man's part an abyss of ingratitude. The glorified life of the risen Jesus is also mystically continued through the Eucharist. The Body of our Savior in the Blessed Sacrament represents a marvelous conquest of grace and glory over matter. We need not envy those who lived in Palestine in the days when *all flesh saw the salvation of the Lord*. In the Eucharist we have by faith Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Calvary, and the holy sepulcher; and without faith what would it have availed us to be contemporaries and witnesses of our Lord living among men?

"O my God, I firmly believe that You are really and corporally present in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. I adore You here present from the very depths of my heart, and I worship Your sacred presence with all possible humility. O my soul, what joy to have Jesus always with us, and to be able to speak to Him, heart to heart, with all confidence. Grant, O Lord, that I, having adored Your divine Majesty here on earth in this wonderful Sacrament, may be able to adore It eternally in heaven" (*Raccolta*).

JUNE 15

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### *The Eucharistic Life*



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"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (Jn. 6:57).

These words of our Savior express the effect of the Eucharistic banquet, which is a mutual dwelling of Christ in the soul and the soul in Christ.

O Jesus, grant that I may add growth and strength to Your

Mystical Body by reproducing in my own life the virtues of  
Your life in the Eucharist.

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In Holy Communion we receive the very Victim slain on the Cross; during the Holy Sacrifice we offer ourselves in imitation of and in union with this same divine Victim. In Communion, therefore, we receive back again, as it were, our own lives united with His and transformed into His divine life, which should then be reproduced in our own. It was an act of unspeakable condescension for the Word of God to become incarnate and to accept the suffering of His passion and death. It was an even greater "emptying of Himself" for Him to assume the Eucharistic life, for there nothing even of the sacred humanity appears; rather, Jesus lives hidden beneath the appearance of bread—an object which lacks all semblance of life and which does not of itself tend to arouse the respect and sympathy which we feel toward a living thing. Jesus, washing the feet of Judas, was less abased than Jesus coming to the lips of any and every human being. His Eucharistic state is in a certain sense the lowliest of all, and yet it was the glorified Son of God who chose it—for the sole purpose of making Himself accessible to us. Could we ever humiliate ourselves for His sake to the extent that He humiliates Himself for us?

The Eucharistic life is also a life of obedience. During His life on earth Jesus obeyed His parents and He obeyed His executioners. In the Eucharist He obeys everyone. He is moved from place to place or left motionless. He is raised and lowered, He is profaned by sacrilegious hands; yet He is ever the Lamb of God who *opened not his mouth*. He obeys the sacrificing priest and the faithful; He comes alike to the humble and devout communicant and to the guilty or

the indifferent. The observance of your vow of obedience requires that you place yourself in the hands of your Superiors as if you were a lifeless body. You can do even better: let yourself be treated like the Host.

The Eucharist is the hearth of Christian charity, absolute and universal. Our full exercise of charity is confined, perhaps, to a circle of friends; the charity of Jesus in the Eucharist knows no limitation. He is for all, without the least reserve. He is ignored, treated with indifference, or even desecrated; and He pardons, He forgives, He gives Himself anew. All the virtues He prescribes for us He practices Himself, and when we find it difficult to follow His precepts, we should fix our eyes upon Him in the Eucharist and imitate His example. Moreover, the Eucharistic life, although hidden and silent, is supremely active. Jesus prays and makes atonement still by offering to the Father His past expiation. From the tabernacle He is ever offering to us supernatural life and vigor for our souls. Let us imitate this life of Jesus and offer Him in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar our active and fervent reparation. He humiliates Himself, let us honor Him; He practices obedience, let us do in everything His holy will. He loves us, let us give Him all our love in return. He lives in the Eucharist for us, let us live only for Him.

“Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, I consecrate to You all the faculties of my soul, all the powers of my body; I would strive to know You and love You ever more and more, in order to make You better known and loved; I would act only for Your glory, I would do only the will of Your Father. I consecrate to You every moment of my life in a spirit of adoration before Your real presence, in a spirit of thanksgiving for this incomparable gift, in a spirit of reparation for all our

cruel indifference, in a spirit of unceasing supplication that our prayers, being offered through You, with You, and in You, may rise purified and enriched to the throne of God's mercy unto His eternal glory" (*Raccolta*).

JUNE 16

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### *The Holy Mass*



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"And having taken bread, he gave thanks and broke, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In like manner he took also the cup after the supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which shall be shed for you'" (Lk. 22:19, 20).

On the eve of His passion our Lord instituted the great memorial which was to perpetuate for all time and in every place the one Sacrifice where *he has perfected forever those who are sanctified*. In the Eucharist as on the cross the body of Jesus is *given* for us; from the Eucharist as from the cross life flows out upon the world.

O Jesus, grant me the dispositions I need in order to gain the fruits of the Mass more abundantly.

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The consecration of the Mass re-presents Jesus Crucified in three ways. First, it commemorates His death on the cross; second, the twofold formula of Consecration separates, as by a sword, the body and blood of Christ; last and especially, Jesus, at the word of the priest, is present on the altar as the Victim who is later to be offered to us in Holy Communion. At the instant of the Consecration an act is per-

formed before our eyes which would be utterly overpowering if we grasped it in its reality. He who is *as if slain* is the Lamb of whom St. John speaks in the Apocalypse. He is God! The sacred Host is the incarnate Son of God, still immolating Himself for our salvation. Who can express the value of this immolation, the value of a Mass? No work glorifies God more, none offers Him greater reparation, none touches Him more nearly. The Mass is the prayer of prayers.

When we assist at Mass we also offer it. We make our own the homage which Jesus, Priest and Victim, offers to the Father; and when we thus glorify God, He is moved with love toward us and bestows upon us the grace truly to repent of our sins. Thus we win remission of our guilt, however great it may be. But when we associate ourselves with Christ Jesus in the role of Priest and Victim, we should bear in mind that it is for God to dispose of the victim offered to Him. We must keep ourselves interiorly throughout the day in the essential attitude of our participation in the Holy Sacrifice; that is, in the attitude of self-oblation, of giving *all* to God, making our acts of self-denial and mortification for Him, and accepting the happenings of each day, above all if they are disagreeable or painful, for love of Him. Also in union with Jesus we offer our petitions and He who prays and supplicates for us on the altar is One whose prayers are always heard. We pray, too, in union with the whole Church as well as with her invisible Head, for *we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread*. And as bread is one through the union of many grains of wheat, so unity is also signified by the Eucharistic wine; "for," says St. Augustine, "the wine was once in so many clusters of grapes; but now it is all one in the sweetness of the chalice; for it has gone through the crushing of the

wine press." United, then, with Jesus and with one another through the Mass, let us offer the divine Son to the Eternal Father and ourselves also with the Host in the dispositions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the cross; namely, intense love for God and our brethren, full abandonment to the divine will, and ardent desire for the salvation of souls.

"O God, who in this wonderful sacrament hast left us a memorial of Thy passion, grant us, we beseech Thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of Thy body and blood, that we may ever perceive within us the fruit of Thy redemption" (Roman Missal).

JUNE 17

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### *The First Cleansing of the Temple*



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"And making a kind of whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, also the sheep and oxen, and he poured out the money of the changers and overturned the tables" (Jn. 2:15).

Adore Jesus manifesting Himself in this incident for the first time publicly as the Messias.

Divine Master, inspire me with holy zeal and teach me how to exercise it.

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On this occasion, Jesus showed Himself for the first time in Jerusalem to the priests and the people. He spoke and acted as one claiming the prerogatives of the Messias and a right of ownership over the Temple. We see Him also in this incident accomplishing His mission of repairing the

honor of His Father by expelling sacrilegious abuses from the Temple. It is noteworthy, too, that Jesus began His public life with an action similar to the one which will conclude it—the banishing of the sellers and money changers from the Temple. On both occasions He is shown to us engaged in the exercise of His principal virtue, zeal for His Father's glory. To Jesus may be applied in their fullest and most ardent meaning the words of the Psalmist: *The zeal for thy house has eaten me up*; and these words, St. John tells us, came to the minds of the disciples as they watched Him.

In this incident, moreover, the outline of the whole public life of our Savior is already discernible. We find Him here, as we shall find Him throughout the rest of His life, accompanied by a small band of followers, without means or resources, exercising His apostolate among the ignorant, the fickle, the inconstant. To the end He will have to cope with the incredulity of a decadent priesthood and their obstinate unbelief will even appear momentarily to gain the victory, only to be ultimately defeated by our Savior's glorious resurrection from the dead. This triumphant conclusion of His apostolate Jesus prophesied at its very commencement. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" was His response to the Jews who asked, "*What sign dost thou show us, seeing that thou dost these things?*"

The reply of our Savior had a double significance for His hearers. For them His words could have referred to the material Temple of Jerusalem or to the temple of His Body, the true Sanctuary and the visible Temple of God. In just retribution for the malicious incredulity of His people, Jesus revealed the truth to them on this occasion in a veiled manner. Yet His reply was clear enough for the Jews to understand that the Savior had at His disposal the highest



divine authority whereby He would perform still greater works. In prophesying His death and resurrection, He gave them a double sign: that of the Resurrection, which was the strongest and most decisive proof of His divinity and the prophecy itself which foretold the Resurrection. It is a striking fact that this utterance, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,*" was the chief accusation made against Jesus when He was brought before His judges. This incident, then, implies the whole destiny of our Savior. It constitutes the program, boldly and clearly outlined, of the contradictions He will face throughout His public career. Let us ask our Lord to grant us a zeal which, like His, will be fearless, unmixed with selfish interests, and directed by obedience.

*Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain, nor swears deceitfully to his neighbor. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, a reward from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob. Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in! (Ps. 23:3-7)*

JUNE 18

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### *The Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Model*



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"Look and make it according to the pattern" (Exod. 25:40).

Imagine that the Lord God is showing you the Sacred Heart of Jesus and saying these words to you as He did to Moses

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when He presented to him the pattern for the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like Yours.

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Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus leads us to virtue, for He offers us His Heart that we may honor It not only by adoration, love, and reparation, but also by conforming our hearts to His. Let us study the adorable dispositions of the Sacred Heart as opposed to our sinful ones. When we are tempted to pride, let us think of how our Lord bore humiliations, calumnies, and insults. His divine example of humility will help us to repress our self-love and vanity. If the memory of an injury or some other trial awakens thoughts of revenge, let us look at the Heart of Jesus and remember how He pardoned His enemies and prayed for His executioners. His example of patience will help to stifle in us every movement of hatred or anger. In temptations against modesty or purity, we have only to think of the pure and stainless Heart of Jesus, formed from the blood of the Immaculate Virgin, and we shall pass through the trial without sin.

The sacrifices demanded by our vow of poverty will not be difficult for us—we shall even desire greater ones—if we have meditated deeply enough upon the privations voluntarily endured by our Lord because of the love of His Heart for us. When our sensitive pride is wounded by an affront, when we are tempted to nourish bitterness against others, let us think of how the Heart of Jesus suffered from the malice of His enemies during His whole life on earth and especially during the Passion, and we shall be more patient and resigned in our little sufferings. Whatever the provocation, in whatever situation we may find ourselves, we can

always look to our Model and apply ourselves to imitating Him.

In devotion to the Sacred Heart we shall also find both the model and source of love for God and our neighbor. It was from the Sacred Heart of Jesus that St. Bernard drew the generous love and tender piety that breathe through his writings. In this Heart St. Bonaventure learned to relish those interior joys and spiritual delights that united him directly with God. The penitent St. Augustine found therein the strength and courage to conquer himself, and from this same adorable Heart the Apostles drew their zeal, the martyrs their triumph, the virgins their purity. Whatever be the needs of our souls, the Heart of Jesus is our refuge, the abyss of all virtues, the source of all consolation. If we are in sin, here is the Heart that pardoned the repentant Magdalene and converted the thief on the cross. If we are lukewarm, here is the hearth of charity where we can rekindle our love and draw forth new strength. If the infinite bounty and the infinite perfections of the Sacred Heart were known to us now as they will one day be revealed in eternity, we should be all but consumed by our sentiments of adoration and love. But it is not for souls as cold and feeble as ours to measure *the breadth and length and height and depth* of the love and perfection of the Sacred Heart. Even if it were given us to comprehend matters so sublime, we, like St. Paul, would be unable to find expression for truths so infinitely surpassing all our powers of language and even of conception.

O loving Savior, You are so good and so powerful that surely You will remove from my heart all that is unworthy of You. Change my heart and make it conformable to Yours. Deign Yourself to inspire me with the sentiments of love, contrition, and gratitude, that will help to atone for the indifference of

those who do not love You. Heart of Jesus, speak to the hearts of all men and draw them to Yourself. I ask this by the wound You suffered on Calvary and by that counterthrust which at the same time pierced the living heart of Mary, Your Mother, who stood beside the cross.

JUNE 19

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*The Love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*



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“Is thy heart right as my heart is with thy heart?” (4 Kings 10:15)

The devotion to the Heart of Jesus has for its object His Sacred Heart united to His body, soul, and divinity, and considered as the seat and center of His love for man.

O Jesus, grant me the desire and the grace of making reparation to Your Sacred Heart.

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In human language the heart is the synonym and the symbol of love. To give one's heart is to give love. Jesus speaks our language when He holds out to us His heart, which of itself tells the story of His love. It is aflame, a “burning furnace of charity”; It is pierced, He loved us unto death; It is surrounded by a crown of thorns, His love has been repelled. “Behold this Heart which has so loved men that It has spared nothing, but has been poured out totally and consumed as proof of Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number only ingratitude, through irreverence and sacrilege and through the coldness and scorn men have for Me in the Sacrament of love. But what touches Me closest is that the very hearts which are consecrated to Me act thus.”

Such were the words of our Savior to St. Margaret Mary, the humble handmaid of the Sacred Heart.

Meditation upon the life and passion of Jesus should have convinced us of His love, but because we did not reflect thereon deeply enough, we needed this moving reminder from the lips of the Savior Himself. We needed to see materially expressed the extent to which He loved us. Surely, the sight of the Sacred Heart will keep before our minds the mystery of divine love. And it was not to St. Margaret Mary alone nor to mankind in general that Jesus spoke in the visions which led to the establishment of world devotion to the Sacred Heart, but to each individual one of us whom He loves as if each of us were the only living human soul. It was for each of us personally that He endured all that He suffered on earth.

Our first duty, clearly, is to return love for love; and this is the primary purpose of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Since this devotion is essentially reparatory, we should manifest our love in this spirit. Jesus Himself recommended to St. Margaret Mary two exercises of expiation: the holy hour and the Communion of reparation. The holy hour He wishes us to spend in union with Him, saddened by the desertion of the Apostles in the Garden of Olives on the night of the passion, appeasing with Him divine justice and begging mercy for sinners. But to practice devotion to the Sacred Heart is not only to watch and pray in Its honor, it is above all to imitate Its virtues. To advance in the devotion is, above all, to advance in the characteristic virtues of the Sacred Heart, namely, humility and zeal; the humility united with meekness which Jesus asks us to learn from Him; and the zeal which is shown in the apostolate of words and actions, prayer and suffering, according to the example of Jesus Himself.

“O God, who in the Heart of Thy Son, wounded by our transgressions, mercifully condescendest to bestow upon us the infinite wealth of Thy love; grant, we beseech Thee, that revering It with due devotion, we may make a worthy reparation for our sins” (Roman Missal).

JUNE 20

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### *The Interview With Nicodemus*



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“Now there was a certain man among the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus at night” (Jn. 3:1, 2).

While our Savior was still in Jerusalem, one of the Pharisees, whose name was Nicodemus, came to speak with Him. He came at night, perhaps that he might converse with our Savior uninterrupted, perhaps because he feared the hostility of the other members of his caste; for they appear to have been irritated and antagonistic from the very commencement of our Lord's public life. Or it may be that Nicodemus came at night in order not to compromise Jesus Himself.

Lord Jesus, teach me through this meditation to exercise prudence in guiding others.

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Nicodemus was a man of prominence, a doctor of the Law and a member of the Sanhedrin; everything seems to indicate that he shared Jewish and Pharisaical prejudices regarding the kingdom of the Messiah. But Nicodemus was a just man, sincerely desirous of finding salvation. Because of the works already performed by Jesus in Jerusalem and because of His teaching, Nicodemus had been slowly arriving

at the conviction that our Savior was a divine envoy extraordinary, a prophet, perhaps even the Messiah. He came, therefore, to see if this last suspicion was valid, and if so, to inquire about the kingdom of the Messiah to which every Pharisee claimed a right of preference. The decision of Nicodemus to seek out Jesus may have represented on his part considerable inconvenience and self-sacrifice; at all events, the sequel proved how important it was for him to follow the first invitation of grace.

Jesus knew the thoughts of His visitor and He instructed him in all he wished to discover concerning His Person and His kingdom, revealing to him at the same time the two means necessary for entrance into this kingdom, namely, Baptism, which is to say, a new and spiritual life, whose basic principle is sacramental Baptism; and faith, the only means of comprehending supernatural truths and the ways of divine Providence. Our Savior also spoke to Nicodemus of the most profound supernatural mysteries: the ineffable love of God as shown by the Incarnation and the Redemption. He enlightened this sincere Pharisee as to the real nature of the kingdom of the Messiah, showing him that it was an interior kingdom, spiritual and supernatural; that its Founder was at once human and divine; and that its distinctive characteristic was not earthly triumph, but redemption through humiliation, suffering, and death.

After this interview Nicodemus left, full of faith, gratitude, and loyalty to Jesus. Even though he did not declare himself immediately as a disciple, the good seed had been sown in his heart and it was to bear fruit. We meet Nicodemus for the first time at the beginning of our Savior's apostolate; we shall see him again at its close, after the consummation of His sacrifice. And what progress in the spirit is implied

in the role Nicodemus plays then, as one of those who lovingly prepare our Savior's body for the tomb. It is consoling to think that with grace, good will, and sincerity, truth could be victorious even among the Pharisees. In Jesus we again admire the perfection of His prudence and His divine condescension. He does not wound the reserve and timidity of Nicodemus, nor reproach him for his Jewish prejudices; on the contrary, He favors him with an extraordinarily full revelation of Himself. By this frankness and plain dealing Jesus shows that He recognized in Nicodemus a man of good will, disposed for receiving even the highest truths of faith. To uprightness and good will Jesus gives all without reserve.

O good Jesus, help me to imitate You in teaching others. Grant me wisdom and prudence, so that I may choose the best way of gaining the confidence and good will of those whom You entrust to me. Make me patient and mild when I am accosted at inopportune times or by persons who I may think are hostile to me. Lord Jesus, do You Yourself act in me and through me.

JUNE 21

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### *The Samaritan Woman*



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“There came a Samaritan woman to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me to drink’” (Jn. 4:7, 8).

Our Savior was alone, sitting at the well, when the Samaritan woman came from the town of Sichar to draw water. He took the initiative in the conversation by requesting of her a small kindness.



Divine Savior, make me alert and docile to the least motions of  
Your grace.

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Our Savior's request in this incident was somewhat unusual, since it was not customary for Jews to speak to an unescorted woman, particularly a Samaritan. And the woman, recognizing Jesus as a Jew by His garb and accent, expressed her surprise: "*How is it that thou, although thou art a Jew, dost ask drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman?*" But Jesus had asked a favor that He might bestow one. "*If thou didst know the gift of God,*" He said, "*and who it is who says to thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou perhaps would have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*" The living water was grace, but this woman did not understand our Savior's words, or did not wish to understand them, and almost in jest, she replied, "*Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Whence then hast thou living water?*" Jesus said in answer, "*Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. He, however, who drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting.*"

The Samaritan woman must have shrugged her shoulders at these words, for with a certain irony, yet politely, she replied, "*Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, or come here to draw.*" This request, lightly made though it was, Jesus willed to grant; but in order to receive His grace the soul must first repent of its sins. And so, briefly, delicately, Jesus opened the eyes of this woman to the state of her soul: "*Go,*" He said, "*call thy husband and come here.*" The woman answered, "*I have no husband.*" "*Thou hast said well, 'I have no husband,'*" replied our Savior, "*for thou hast*

had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. In this thou hast spoken truly." Here we might have expected the Samaritan to show annoyance, but she admitted her guilt humbly: "Sir, I see that thou art a prophet." She has prayed, she is humble, and now the level of her thought rises. She asks Jesus if it is on Mount Garizim that one should worship or at Jerusalem—the great controversy that divided the Jews and the Samaritans. "Woman, believe me . . .," said our Savior, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." Not comprehending this high doctrine very well, the woman replied, "I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ) and when he comes he will tell us all things." Then Jesus, more indulgent toward this poor woman than He had been even toward Nicodemus, said, "I who speak with thee am he."

What progress was made by this soul in the few moments of her interview with our Savior! At first she recognized Him as a Jew; next she addressed Him with greater respect, using the title, *Sir*; then she acknowledged Him as a prophet; and finally, in her joyful summoning of her fellow townsmen, as perhaps *the Christ*. It is true that Jesus had been awaiting this woman—as He awaits us all. But she was receptive to His first request, as we, perhaps, are not. She gave Him to drink and she was recompensed for this first act of good will by another gift of grace. Then her progressive fidelity led her to the great privilege of hearing the direct revelation of our Savior's identity. Let us adore the goodness of Jesus who came so far to find this poor soul, and let us imitate the docility of this soul who listens to Jesus, prays, and humbles herself.

Grant me, O Jesus, the living water of Your grace and Your

love that my heart may no longer desire to drink from the fountains which do not spring up unto life everlasting. Let me hear Your voice today and not harden my heart, when You ask of me an act of obedience, of self-denial, of humility; lest the grace, received in vain, may not return again; as the Samaritan woman would not have encountered You a second time.

JUNE 22

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### *A Second Miracle at Cana*



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“Unless you see signs and wonders, you do not believe” (Jn. 4:48). We find Jesus again in the little village of Cana where He had performed the first of His miracles. A royal official, probably in the service of Herod Antipas, came to Jesus there from Capharnaum to beg a cure for his son who was gravely ill with a fever.

O Body and Blood of Christ, which I shall receive this day, sanctify me and cleanse me from sin.

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In the case of the Gentile centurion of Capharnaum who asked our Savior to cure his servant, Jesus, without waiting to be asked, said, *“I will come and cure him.”* Now, however, when He was implored by this royal official, who was a Jew, to come and heal his son, Jesus delayed. St. Gregory tells us that He did this to confound our pride, the vice that causes us to be prompt and eager in serving those who bear external signs of honor and power, but reluctant and careless in assisting the poor and lowly. Such distinctions are opposed to true charity. For those who serve God alone,

for His own sake, there is no respecting of persons, but the image of God and the works of His power are seen in all men alike.

Another reason for our Savior's not heeding immediately the prayer of this anxious father was the imperfection of his faith, although it is evident that he sincerely believed Jesus had the power to heal his child; otherwise, he would not have come so far to ask our Savior's help. The words of Jesus, "*Unless you see signs and wonders you believe not,*" were, therefore, addressed not to the suppliant alone, but to the Jews in general. They were also meant, however, as a test of this man's faith. For him Jesus seems to have been neither Son of God nor Messiah, but merely a prophet and wonder-worker. The weakness of his faith was shown in that he supposed the presence of our Savior to be a necessary condition for the cure. And so Jesus addressed these words of reproach to him as well as to his coreligionists; for to see first and then believe was the order preferred by most of them.

But the father, supported by his love and concern for his child, stood the test and more urgently repeated his petition: "*Sir, come down before my child dies*"; as if death itself could render Jesus powerless. This agonized prayer was answered more promptly than the father would have dared to hope. "*Go thy way,*" said our Savior, "*thy son lives.*" Again, there was the trial of faith. Jesus still declined to go to the boy and merely announced the cure which had already taken place in Capharnaum more than twenty miles distant from Cana. Despite this new test and his first insistence, the father of the boy now believed; and as he journeyed down the long descent leading from Cana to Capharnaum, he was met by his servants, who verified the cure and that it had

taken place precisely at the time at which Jesus had said to him, "*Thy son lives.*" Thus was the faith of this man advanced another degree toward perfection and through him his whole household received faith. We see again how adversity can help us grow in faith, humility, and fortitude, and be made to contribute in the end to the service and glory of God.

Divine Master, with the sincerity of this Jewish official I cry humbly to You: Lord, come down in Holy Communion this day to strengthen and purify my faith, to heal my inordinate affections and sinful habits, that are weakening my soul and that, left unchecked, could cause its death. And when I have the happiness of possessing You, body and blood, soul and divinity, remain with me and never let me be separated from You.

JUNE 23

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### *Return of Jesus to Nazareth*



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"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and according to his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read" (Lk. 4:16).

See Jesus speaking to the people in the synagogue of the village of Nazareth where He had spent His youth.

Divine Master, grant me courage and zeal for the truth even in the face of antagonism and probable failure.

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Nazareth possessed an unenviable reputation among the Jews; and, while this poor village was to receive enduring glory from Jesus, He Himself was often to be discredited

because He had come from there. Now He returns to Nazareth, having waited until His reputation was well established, for He knew His fellow townsmen.\* This visit was prompted by a just and charitable recognition of the natural claims of relatives and fellow-citizens. Jesus wished to show His gratitude to the little town where He had grown to manhood. Perhaps, also, for our instruction and consolation, He desired to give us an example of an unfruitful apostolate, and under circumstances where failure would not be expected. He Himself foresaw this lack of success, but His foreknowledge did not deter Him.

He comes, then, to the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day. He is invited, or He offers Himself, for the customary reading and explanation of the Law and the Prophets. They hand Him the book of Isaias; He unrolls it and finds a passage whose Messianic sense was familiar to all: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he has anointed me; to bring good news to the poor he has sent me, to proclaim to the captives release, and sight to the blind; to set at liberty the oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of recompense.* Then, rolling the book, Jesus is seated. The curiosity of the crowd is intense, for it is well known that Jesus has been teaching and working miracles. All eyes are fixed upon Him as He proceeds to apply this text, so clearly Messianic, to Himself. "Today," Jesus begins, "*this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" He develops this theme, and all . . . says St. Luke,  *marvelled at*

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\* The violent expulsion of Jesus from the synagogue at Nazareth happened after He had been preaching publicly for some time in Galilee. Either St. Luke is anticipating by placing this event at the beginning of our Lord's ministry in Galilee, or he is fusing two separate visits to Nazareth.

*the words of grace that came from his mouth.*

But an arresting thought occurs to the listening crowd: "Is not this Joseph's son?" Then, how, they say among themselves, can He be the Messiah? And not only prejudice, but also jealousy feeds their antagonism; they wish Jesus to perform for them miracles such as He had worked at Capharnaum. They refuse to believe in Him, but they demand miracles. Jesus knew their bad dispositions and, precisely because of their unbelief, He refused to work the miracles which, indeed, by reason of their rejection of Him would have served only to increase their guilt. He severely reproached them for their incredulity, observing that no prophet is honored in his own country. Elias and Eliseus, He reminded them, were not believed by their own people, and could work miracles only among strangers; and so it was there and then at Nazareth. The idea that God could have preferred the pagans so infuriated the people of Nazareth that *they rose up and put him forth out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill, on which their town was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But he, passing through their midst, went his way.* Jesus had come to His own and His own had rejected Him. Capharnaum would henceforth be known as *his own town*; for Jesus of Nazareth had been banished from Nazareth.

O good Jesus, help me to imitate the beautiful virtues You practiced in this incident: Your loyal charity to Your own, Your courage and humility, which did not draw back from prospective failure, the firmness with which You revealed the truth to the people of Nazareth, although You knew it would provoke their anger, Your merciful benevolence which demands faith first, because the faith that precedes miracles is more meritorious for us.

*The First Miraculous Draft of Fishes*



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“Put out into the deep, and lower your nets for a catch” (Lk. 5:4).

Because of the press of the crowd, Jesus had delivered His instruction on this occasion from Peter’s boat, which he had withdrawn a little from the land at the Master’s request. Now, having finished His discourse, Jesus told Peter to launch out into the deep and let down his nets.

Lord Jesus, help me to renounce all that hinders me from following You according to Your will.

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Our Savior addressed the command to launch out into the deep to St. Peter alone. St. Ambrose sees in this action the symbol of a personal privilege granted to St. Peter of insight into the most profound mysteries; for, St. Ambrose explains, it was Peter who later recognized the divine nature in Christ Jesus and proclaimed His divine generation. Simon now replied to the Master’s order in the name of the others: “*Master, the whole night through we have toiled and have taken nothing, but at thy word I will lower the net.*” What faith and confidence against his own experienced judgment and against all likelihood of success! What could be hoped for from one cast of the net in full daylight, always less favorable to this kind of fishing than darkness? But that which is done by divine order is sure to succeed.

Peter obeyed, and the net enclosed so great a number of fish that it broke. *And they beckoned to their companions in*



*the other boat to come and help them.* This miracle was a most gracious and benevolent favor which Jesus accorded Peter as a compensation for the futile labors of the night and as a recompense for his faith and docility. But it was more than a manifestation of the divine goodness and bounty. The miraculous draught of fishes was a prophecy of the miraculous apostolate which would begin with the conversion of the three thousand after Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost.

Peter, filled with astonishment at the prodigy, could only fall on his knees before His Master and cry out, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" This prayer pleased Jesus. He ever withdraws from the complacent and the self-satisfied and approaches those who deem themselves unworthy of His presence. The prayer of Peter should be ours also when we kneel before the majesty of God made Man in the adorable Sacrament of the Altar. The reply of our Savior, "*Do not be afraid; henceforth thou shalt catch men,*" appears to have been addressed not to Peter alone, but to the others who were with him as well; for St. Luke continues, *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed him.* Simon Peter, however, is particularly addressed throughout this incident as being the future head of the apostolic college. It is in the bark of Peter, that is, in the Church, that Jesus Christ is to be found, teaching and working miracles. How glorious is God in His saints! The fisherman of Galilee is to become the Vicar of Christ, the first Pope. How greatly to his interest it was to obey the divine command and respond to the call of Christ! Our dreams for ourselves can never equal the plans God has for us; and who knows to what degree of virtue and glory we might attain, if only we would let ourselves be guided

solely by grace, surrendering ourselves in full confidence and abandonment to the divine will!

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?  
The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?  
When evildoers come at me to devour my flesh, my foes and  
enemies themselves stumble and fall. Though an army encamp  
against me, my heart will not fear; though war be waged upon  
me, even then will I trust (Ps. 26:1-3).*

JUNE 25

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### *“We . . . Have Taken Nothing”*



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“Master, the whole night through we have toiled and have taken nothing” (Lk. 5:5).

The Apostles who had toiled in vain all night are symbolic of those persons who lose the merit and fruit of their works by acting from selfish motives or out of vanity.

O Jesus, preserve me from self-deception with regard to the motives of my actions.

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The saddest consequence of vainglory is that it deprives us of our recompense with God. Our Lord Himself assured us of this when He said, *“Take heed not to practise your good before men, in order to be seen by them; otherwise you shall have no reward with your Father in heaven”*; this terrifying threat is repeated three times within the same chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Yet how many there are among Christians, even among religious, who gladly suffer inconvenience, hardship, and fatigue, provided they can in this way gain

admiration or even pity! What great merit there would be in their works of zeal if only their intention were upright and pure, directed to God alone! But, alas, it costs us dear to be content with the divine approval only; it is so sweet to lower our gaze to see what creatures think of us. We may even succeed in deluding ourselves into the belief that our motives are pure, but let us remember that God sees the depths, that He is *the searcher of heart and soul*. When St. Hilarion saw himself the object of esteem and even veneration among his people, he exclaimed, "How greatly am I to be pitied! I am receiving my reward in this life, for Palestine and Syria account me to be something." Let us see whether these are our sentiments, whether we dread to be recompensed by the esteem of men after we have performed a good work.

The desire for esteem also tends to blind the eyes of the soul, so that we do not see ourselves as we really are. Human praise distorts our view of ourselves; it makes the evil that is in us seem to vanish; or at least it becomes less apparent to us, while the little good that we are able to do is exaggerated and embellished with the most alluring and deceptive hues. Our limitations seem not to awaken sentiments of humility in us, but the least advantage we believe ourselves to possess inflates our vanity. And from the good opinion we have of ourselves the distance is short to the conviction that we are really worthy of esteem. Often we begin an action well, fixing our gaze upon God alone and willing only His good pleasure; but then, we become conscious that we are being noticed or admired or praised, and at that instant, unless the thought is immediately repressed, we are turned aside, distracted from our initial aim, and arrested in our upward flight. Our passion for the esteem of others also

causes us unhappiness. A rebuke irritates us, a disagreement makes us unquiet, preference shown another troubles us; in short, there is no need of any valid external reason for anxiety, since we readily create our own unhappiness. If only we would have the courage to mortify habitually our natural desire for praise until we learned to take account only of what God sees in us, what He knows of us, and His judgment of our actions, how peaceful and happy we should become! Then we should experience the truth of the words: "Be humble and you will have in your soul peace, tranquillity, and happiness."

O God, help me to see You only in all things. Assist me during this day to direct my intention consciously toward You in all that I shall say and do. Let not vainglory rob me of the merit of my good works, but enable me to repress instantly the first movements of vanity. With the help of Your grace, I shall learn to account as true glory only that which awaits the humble of heart in heaven. Jesus, meek and humble of heart, have mercy on me!

JUNE 26

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### *The Expelling of the Unclean Spirit*



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"Now in the synagogue there was a man possessed by an unclean devil" (Lk. 4:33).

For the first time our Savior finds Himself face to face with the visible empire of Satan over humanity, and He confronts the enemy as a conqueror, as the Strong One who has appeared that He might *destroy the works of the devil*.

Good Jesus, keep me mindful of my baptismal renunciation of the devil's works and pomps.

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It is very instructive to observe the behavior of the possessed man in the presence of Jesus. The evil spirit, who is an *unclean* spirit, had not been accosted by our Savior; but His very presence and, perhaps also, His teaching, which the possessed person had heard, both provoked and intimidated the demon. Trembling and whining with fear, he cried out to Jesus, either recognizing Him as the Messiah, or, at least, hazarding a guess at His identity. His words, "*Hast thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God,*" may be viewed either as an avowal wrested from him by force or a flattering supplication inspired by fear and by the hope that Jesus would not drive him out. In either case his exclamation gives evidence of panic and weakness. Yet, when he is forced to leave his victim, he makes a last futile effort to destroy him, throwing him upon the ground in violent convulsions.

In our Savior, on the contrary, we observe, in the first place, a majestic calm. He does not concern Himself with the pleading of the demon nor with his acknowledgment of His divinity. Scorning the homage of those unclean lips, He sternly bids the evil spirit be silent; for the glory of revealing Jesus Christ to the world is reserved for the Apostles. Our Savior would teach us here not to temporize with the devil, who is ever a deceiver and who continues to seek for a way to do harm even when he has been forced to proclaim the truth. Jesus, who is goodness and mercy itself has only a stern and contemptuous word for these spirits who are the declared and irreconcilable foes of God and man. But what compassion He shows to the unfortunate victim of the

malice and hatred of the devil in rescuing him from the power of hell!

If the teaching of Jesus had amazed and enraptured the people of Capharnaum, this evidence of His mastery over the evil spirits inspired them with fear and reverence. They said to one another, "*What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.*" The voice of Jesus is the voice of the Lord which, as David says, *strikes fiery flames and shakes the desert*; it is the voice of the Lord that *twists the oaks and strips the forest*. This miracle has a special character in that here the power of the Savior is not exercised without impediment, as was the case with the miracles He works in the realm of nature. His power encounters here a resistant hostile force—the might of hell; and yet this power is broken by one word from His divine lips. A new light is also cast upon the nature of the evil spirits, whom we see in this incident to be at once so powerful and so impotent, so shrewd, and yet heedless enough to serve the cause of the God they hate.

O Jesus, make me quick to recognize the wiles of the devil when I am tempted to yield in small ways to my weaknesses, especially to my predominant fault. Enable me to be firm and decisive in rejecting his evil suggestions, even when sin is not directly involved; and help me to choose habitually the better course of action that will lead me to perfection.

*The Cure of a Leper*



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“Now when he had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came up and worshipped him, saying, ‘Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean’” (Mt. 8:1, 2).

The time and place of this miracle are uncertain. St. Matthew, alone, places it immediately after the Sermon on the Mount. The locality appears to be some town in Galilee.

Divine Master, grant me the grace of feeling the maladies of my soul more keenly than I feel bodily ills.

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Having come down from the mountain where He had been preaching, our Savior encountered a leper who worshiped Him and asked to be cured of his disease. In thus accosting Jesus, the leper did a thing which was absolutely forbidden, as St. Luke seems to note by calling attention to his particularly loathsome condition: *behold, there was a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus he fell on his face and besought him.* In the leper’s whole attitude as well as in his words, there was not only deep respect, but also extraordinary faith in the power and goodness of Jesus. He said to Him, “*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*” And Jesus, out of pity, as St. Mark tells us, *stretched forth his hand and touched him.* By touching this man afflicted with so repulsive a disease, Jesus particularly manifested His pity and benevolence. Moreover, in His compassionate touch of the leper, our Savior bore witness to His humanity, just as the command “*Be thou made clean*” proved His divinity;

for the leper was healed by no borrowed aid, but by a single contact and a simple word! O ineffable goodness of Jesus, ever attentive to the desires of the poor and the unfortunate and ever prompt to do the will of those who fear Him!

Our Savior then imposed two conditions on the leper: he must present himself to the priests at Jerusalem and speak of the miracle to no one. The first recommendation was made in compliance with the prescription of Moses, whereby a leper who was cured or was thought to be, had to present himself before the priest to be examined by him and given a certificate of his cure, if it was found to be authentic. Probably Jesus explicitly reminded the leper of this obligation, since his sudden cure might easily have caused him to forget the condition prescribed by the Law; and in this case the priests would not miss the opportunity of accusing our Savior of desiring to transgress the law of Moses. As for the admonition not to publicize the miracle, we find this recommendation more than once in the Gospel. Our Savior wished to teach His disciples and us that good should not be done with a view to attracting notice or for useless display. But His principal motive here as in other cases seems to have been the avoidance of needless provocation of His enemies. The leper, however, reported the cure everywhere, with a good intention, no doubt, and out of gratitude. The result was so great a gathering of the sick and infirm that Jesus *could no longer openly enter a town, but remained outside in desert places*. From this we may infer the vehemence of the secret hostility against Him.

“Almighty and eternal God, mercifully look upon our infirmity, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us” (Roman Missal).



*The Leper's Prayer*



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"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Mt. 8:2).  
Picture the leper worshiping Jesus and asking for a cure.  
Divine Savior, grant me the dispositions necessary for the cure  
of all my ills.

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The dispositions and the prayer of the leper in this incident from the Gospel deserve our close attention. We see in him strong faith, exemplary reverence, and humble confidence. Bravely he accosted Jesus, of whose power and goodness he doubtless had heard, and prostrated himself before Him in worship, saying, "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" The brevity and tact of this petition recall to our minds those other similar prayers, whose efficacy we know from the Gospel: "*They have no wine,*" "*Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick.*" But if the words were few, the fervor and confidence implied in them were very great. And by employing almost the same words in His answer, "*I will; be thou made clean,*" Jesus seemed to express His approval of the manner in which the leper had made his request. He was cured at once, for by his moving prayer he had confessed the divinity of Jesus, His power, and his own firm hope of being heard.

If our faith were as strong as that of the leper, we should not remain so imperfect and languid of spirit. Jesus extended His hand and touched the leper, in order to make known the power of His sacred flesh, which can impart health, purity, and holiness to body and soul. Not only once, as

in the case of the leper, but daily we come into contact with the body of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. If our dispositions in receiving Him were less imperfect, what streams of life-giving virtue would flow into our souls from this source of strength and sanctity of body and soul! Like the leper we must lift up our voices and cry to the Savior until we are healed. If our will is feeble, uncertain, and inconstant, we shall never break with sin. Lukewarm prayers do not touch the heart of God, nor will feeble sighs accomplish the work of our total conversion to Him. He hears not the cry of the lips but the cry of the heart that is penetrated with sorrow for sin.

Let us not cease to cry out to Him until we hear the consoling words, "*I will; be thou made clean.*" These words we truly hear whenever we receive worthily the Sacrament of Penance. For, although our divine Master can cure the leprosy of sin without the intervention of His ministers, He has willed that the sinner show himself to the priest of the New Dispensation, just as He instructed the leper in the Gospel to present himself to the ministers of the Old Law.

O divine Savior, bring healing to my soul today. Touch it in Holy Communion with the full efficacy of Your holy and sanctifying flesh. Command me to be interiorly and exteriorly healed and purified, that I may be "washed yet more from my iniquity and cleansed from all my sins."

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*The Paralytic of Capharnaum*




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“And getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own town. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic lying on a pallet” (Mt. 9:1, 2).

The house in Capharnaum where Jesus was teaching on this occasion was so crowded, St. Mark tells us, that there was no longer room not even around the door. While our Savior was instructing those who were fortunate enough to get near Him, a pallet bearing a paralytic was lowered through an opening made in the roof.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of obtaining in this life the remission of all my sins.

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As Jesus sat teaching this large audience, which included Pharisees and Scribes from the villages of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem, a litter bearing a paralytic was lowered through an opening in the roof into the midst of the astonished throng and placed before Jesus. The large audience, the presence of the Scribes and Pharisees, the faith and generous charity of the sick man's friends—all these circumstances imparted to this occasion a special solemnity. That the general atmosphere was favorable to the working of the miracle is indicated by the words of St. Luke: *And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.* Our Savior's procedure in performing this cure was itself remarkable. He intended to profit by this opportunity for revealing to the people and to the Pharisees that the Son of Man was also the Son of God, by exercising His power of forgiving

sins. His words, "*Take courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee,*" signified a formal remission of sins, and it was so that the Pharisees and Scribes understood them.

Jesus began with the remission of sins not only to carry out His primary intention of manifesting His possession of this power, but also to show that sin is a greater evil than physical infirmity; and perhaps also for the reason that sin in this case appears to have been the cause of the malady. Then, He proved His right to exercise the power of remitting sins by reading the secret thoughts of the Scribes and Pharisees; for God alone can read thoughts, just as God alone can forgive sins. Finally, Jesus confirmed the reality of His power to forgive sins by healing the paralysis. The specific aim of the cure was to bear witness to this power, which the prophets had attributed to the Messiah, and to prove thereby His divinity. "*But that you may know,*" He said, "*that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins . . . I say to thee, arise,*" He said to the paralytic, "*take up thy pallet and go to thy house.*" To forgive sins, to read men's secret thoughts, to cure miraculously are equally impossible to man, but to God they are all equally easy; in this instance the outward cure was accomplished merely by a word of command.

As for the effect of this miracle, the cured paralytic was naturally filled with joy and gratitude, and he went to his house glorifying God. The bystanders, too, were filled with admiration and gratitude to God, but they were also struck with a reverential fear and they said, "*Never did we see the like.*" And what of the Scribes and Pharisees? They seem to have felt nothing of all this, yet *the power of the Lord was present to heal them.* They had personally witnessed the prodigy, they understood the significance of what

had taken place well enough to say to themselves, "*Who can forgive sins, but God only?*" But still they did not believe.

O Jesus, I adore You as my Savior and my God. The Pharisees protested against those words of Yours, "*Thy sins are forgiven thee*"; but as for me I believe and confess that You alone have expiated my sins by Your blood, that You alone can with sovereign authority remit my sins by Your merits. In Your mercy, O divine Jesus, make me hear within my heart those consoling words You spoke to the paralytic: "*Take courage . . . thy sins are forgiven thee.*"

JUNE 30

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### *The Call of Matthew*



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"And after this he went forth; and he saw a publican, named Levi, sitting in the tax-collector's place, and he said to him, 'Follow me'" (Lk. 5:27).

As Jesus was walking along the lakeside at Capharnaum, He stopped before a tollhouse where Levi, the son of Alphaeus, was busy at his work.

Good Jesus, grant me the strength of will to break once and for all with everything that keeps me from being a true follower of Yours.

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The three Evangelists who record the calling of Matthew all allude to the glance of Jesus as He stopped before the desk of the publican, Levi. What blended majesty and sweetness there must have been in this gaze, penetrating even to the most secret depths of the soul, this divine glance

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which from all eternity had rested upon Matthew! The gaze of Jesus was the omnipotent regard of Him who draws living souls out of the void and who in one and the same instant casts the seed and gathers the fruit. Immediately our Savior said to Matthew, *"Follow me."* And leaving all things, continues St. Luke, *he arose and followed him.* The summons of Jesus was to this publican as a light so bright and living that he left straightway his home and family, his business and property. He exchanged his customhouse for the throne of the judges of Israel and the registry of taxes for the recording of the Gospel.

The manner in which St. Matthew responded to the call of Jesus implies a magnanimous nature. He obeyed immediately—this detail also is noted by all three Evangelists. He left all things and followed our Savior with joy and gratitude. Perhaps it was to signalize this moment of grace that he changed his name from Levi to Matthew (i.e., "grace of God" or "gift of God"); at all events, even if he already bore "Matthew" as a second name, he used it exclusively after the call of Jesus, for no other name appears in the recorded lists of the Apostles. He also celebrated the occasion by giving a feast to which our Savior, as guest of honor, the disciples, and Matthew's fellow publicans were invited. His intention in this would seem to have been not only to show his gratitude to Jesus and mark the commencement of his new way of life, but also to bring his former companions into contact with the Savior and to make Him know them—already Matthew was an Apostle!

But we are not to conclude from the eager docility of St. Matthew that Jesus never met with resistance. We know of one instance, at least, in which a soul called by Him hesitated and finally refused. The Gospel does not record

the names of the others who may have rejected our Savior's invitation or who, perhaps, became disciples only temporarily; but it is probable that then as now a great many appeals were necessary to make one disciple. We should learn from this incident of the calling of Matthew that when divine grace encounters a responsive, docile soul, it can work a very rapid and profound transformation. No one while he lives is to be despaired of, for there is no condition of life nor state of soul that God cannot turn to account for His kingdom. Let us resolve, then, to pray with greater earnestness that sinners may have the grace of repentance, and that we ourselves may respond with eagerness and sincerity when Jesus invites us to a closer imitation and a more perfect union with Him.

Great St. Matthew, obtain for me a sincere and magnanimous heart. I also wish to accept the invitation of Jesus to a new life of greater humility, self-denial, and prayerfulness; help me to conquer my selfishness, so that, like you, I may follow Jesus with joy and as you did attract others also to His service.

JULY 1

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*The Precious Blood of Our Savior*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 818)

JULY 2

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*The Visitation of Our Lady to St. Elizabeth*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 820)

## *The Question of Fasting*



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“Now they said to him, ‘Why do the disciples of John fast so often and make supplications and likewise those of the Pharisees, whereas thy disciples eat and drink?’” (Lk. 5:33)

The calling of St. Matthew marks the beginning of new difficulties for our Savior. The Pharisees, angered that Jesus should associate with publicans and even call one of them to the apostolate, now for the first time make an open attack on Him. The feast given by St. Matthew in Jesus’ honor was, perhaps, the occasion of the complaint recorded by St. Luke. Good Jesus, help me to imitate Your gentleness and reasonableness in the face of ill will and opposition.

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Our Savior is here reproached for not obliging His disciples to fast and pray as John the Baptist had done and as the Pharisees were demanding of their disciples. It is true that the recitation of prayers and the observance of fasts are important practices of the spiritual life. It is equally true, however, that along with a full exercise of prayer and fasting one can still be far removed from interior perfection, as the disciples of John and the Pharisees show in their complaint on this occasion. Jesus, far from condemning fasting in itself, will later give precepts on this subject, and His disciples will fast according to His example; but this was not the time, He said in effect on this occasion, to prescribe rules for fasting. *“Can you make the wedding guests fast,”* asked our Savior, *“as long as the bridegroom is with them?”*



Such was the case that moment. The Savior was the Messiah, who had come to espouse the Church and in her all mankind. His disciples were His companions, His attendants, as it were, called to share in the joy of the betrothal. It was becoming, then, that they should rejoice; to mourn would have implied that the Messiah, the bridegroom of Israel, had not yet come. The Pharisees might have found the key to our Savior's imagery in the words of Isaias referring to the union of Christ with the Church: *Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt remember no more the reproach of thy widowhood.* The disciples of John might have recalled the same figure as used by their master: *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices exceedingly at the voice of the bridegroom. This my joy, therefore, is made full."*

In this same instruction, furthermore, Jesus showed by a parable that the spirit which commonly dictated observance of the Old Law would not suffice in the New Dispensation; one cannot safely patch an old garment with new cloth; new vessels must be prepared for the new wine, namely, His law and His spirit. Later, after the work of our Redemption had been completed, when the Apostles will be filled with the Holy Spirit and transformed by Him, then they will fast and with a higher motive than that which now prompted the fasting of the Pharisees. We should observe also how kindly Jesus made excuse for those who had come to Him with the complaint, especially for the disciples of John. They did not understand the Gospel, they found it strange, our Savior tactfully implied, because they were accustomed to the Old Law: "And no man after drinking the old wine immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Thus gently did Jesus admonish the partisans of the Old Dispensation to guard against attachment to habit and not to condemn as bad all that was new.

Lord Jesus, I adore the perfections You manifested on this occasion: Your calm and patient gentleness before an indelicate and offensive complaint, Your moderation and reasonableness in dealing with Your own followers as well as with Your enemies, Your readiness to make allowance for those who opposed You.

JULY 4

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### *The Sabbath: The Ears of Grain*



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“Now it came to pass on the second first Sabbath, that he was going through standing grain, and his disciples were plucking and eating the ears of grain, rubbing them with their hands. But some of the Pharisees said to them, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’” (Lk. 6:1, 2)

One Sabbath day, during His early ministry in Galilee, as Jesus and His disciples were following a path which bordered or cut across a cornfield, the disciples, to allay their hunger, plucked some ears of grain and shelled them in their hands. For this they were blamed by the Pharisees.

Divine Savior, teach me how to apply right principles with due regard for circumstances, times, and persons.

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It does not seem that our Savior shared His disciples’ little repast, but with sweetness and condescension, He permitted them this small gratification. The simplicity and

poverty of Jesus and His little band of followers is clearly reflected in this incident. The road is dusty, the sun hot. There are no shady trees or cool streams, nothing but the fields of grain ripe for the harvest. Our Savior and His disciples do not carry with them even necessary supplies of food, but the disciples are content. They do not wish to fare better than their Master. Beautiful example of frugality and apostolic simplicity! But the quite innocent manner in which the disciples appeased their hunger drew upon our Savior the reproaches of the Pharisees. Their conduct on this occasion was reprehensible in all respects. They evidently kept a continual and sly watch upon Jesus with the intention of finding matter for accusation; perhaps they had received a directive to this effect from Jerusalem. In any case, they here charged Him again with a violation of the Sabbath in that He had allowed the disciples to pluck and shell the ears of corn.

Jesus did not enter into controversy with them over the validity of their interpretation, but He raised the matter to a higher level by showing that the Sabbath precept was ordained not only for the worship of God, but for man's benefit as well; consequently, it could not be the cause of detriment to man either in soul or body without ceasing to bind. What our Lord wishes to teach us is that in a human emergency and in the service of God it was permissible to deviate from the Sabbath law; and the more so in this instance, since the Apostles, journeying in company with the Savior and employed in His service, were engaged in a ministry far holier than that of the temple. "*But I tell you,*" said Jesus to the Pharisees, "*that one greater than the temple is here.*" And because their accusation was prompted by spite and was contrary to the spirit of the Law, that is,

against charity and mercy, Jesus quoted to them the reproach and the admonition of the prophet Osee, "*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*"

In this episode, an instance of the Sabbath controversy, we see our divine Savior magnificently revealed as Lord and Lawgiver with an authority wholly divine, and manifesting again the benevolence of His Sacred Heart, which makes due allowance for circumstances, times, and persons in the application of His precepts. We find Him once more fearlessly confronting His adversaries and clearly defining the issue between Himself and them by invoking His supreme authority over the Temple, the Law, and the entire Old Testament.

Lord Jesus, help me to know when it is right to be fearless and outspoken. Let me not make concessions detrimental to truth and justice for fear of giving offense; nor through timidity and false prudence seek to please in order to avoid conflict. Teach me how to be, like You, reserved and discreet or courageous and firm at the right time.

JULY 5

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### *The Man With the Withered Hand*



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"And it came to pass on another Sabbath that he entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there and his right hand was withered" (Lk. 6:6).

Represent to yourself Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Before Him is a man with a withered hand; surrounding them

are the Pharisees sharply watching to see whether Jesus will perform a cure.

Lord Jesus, help me to learn from You not to forget mercy even in just anger.

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Perhaps the Pharisees, knowing well that Jesus would take pity on him, had artfully maneuvered this afflicted man into a position directly in front of Jesus, so that he would attract our Savior's attention. Still more craftily they challenged Jesus, asking whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They proposed this question publicly in the crowded synagogue. Their purpose was entirely malicious in that they hoped to secure evidence against Jesus, even, as the sequel showed, for a capital charge. Their procedure also was unfair in that they kept an obstinate silence when Jesus in His turn interrogated them, saying, "*I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil? to save a life, or to destroy it?*" It may be that by these last words our Savior wished to let the Pharisees know that He was well aware of the plot they were forming against His life. He would here remind them that if, as their behavior toward Him seemed to imply they believed, one might not even do good to others on the Sabbath, still less was it permitted to plan another's destruction.

The Pharisees refused also to answer our Savior's further question as to whether a man was permitted to draw his one sheep out of the pit if it should fall in on the Sabbath day — an act which was allowed even by the casuists of the Pharisee sect. Then, as they maintained their stubborn silence, Jesus, *looking round upon them*, St. Mark says, *with anger*, that is, with sorrowful indignation at their spiritual blindness, said to the afflicted man, "*Stretch forth thy hand.*"

He did so and it was restored, as sound as the other. The triumph of Jesus in this controversy and their own humiliation before so large an audience, as well as the striking miracle, thoroughly exasperated the Pharisees. *But they were filled with fury*, St. Luke tells us, *and began to discuss among themselves what they should do to Jesus*. Their hatred even drove them to ally themselves with the Herodians, their own enemies and enemies of their nation, in conspiring against Jesus.

As for our Savior Himself, this increased hostility prompted Him to retire with His disciples to Lake Tiberias whither a large crowd followed Him, bringing their sick and possessed. *He healed many*, records St. Mark, *so that as many as had ailments were pressing upon him to touch him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they beheld him, fell down before him and cried out, saying, "Thou art the Son of God."* And he charged them strictly not to make him known. Again, it would appear that our Savior takes care not to provoke His adversaries unnecessarily. We are rightly repelled by the perfidious conduct of the Pharisees in this incident, but we also see even more clearly revealed the goodness and the mildness of the Heart of Jesus. Even in His indignation He did not forget His mercy. Always He deigns to answer and to instruct; and the miracle He worked on this occasion was not meant to excite antagonism. On the contrary, He withdrew after this cure of the man with the withered hand to spare His foes the sight of any further cures, and so prevent them from incurring an even more severe judgment than that which already awaited them. Divine Savior, truly did Isaias say of You, *The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth*. This is true of You,

good Jesus, in Your treatment not only of afflicted and repentant sinners, but also of Your enemies. You do not dispute violently with them nor overwhelm and destroy them by Your power; but with divine patience and long-suffering You withdraw from them, that they may have time for reflection and repentance, or at least may not add to their guilt. Help me, Lord Jesus, to be more like You.

JULY 6

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*Sermon on the Mount: The Eight Beatitudes*



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“And seeing the crowds, he went up the mountain. And when he was seated, his disciples came to him. And opening his mouth he taught them” (Mt. 5:1).

See the great crowds surrounding Jesus and listening in rapt silence as He delivers His great Sermon on the Mount.

Divine Savior, impart to me Your wisdom, that in thought, word, and deed I may obey the law of grace rather than the law of nature.

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The crowd arranged themselves in a grassy plain about Jesus who was seated, as a master instructing his pupils. Then, looking upon His disciples, since it was for them especially that He would speak, Jesus delivered one of the greatest discourses ever uttered by human lips. The Sermon on the Mount forms a complement to the Law promulgated on another mountain, Mount Sinai. There God spoke amid thunder and lightning and to only one privileged member of His people. Here, familiarly seated among His own in a

woodland setting of peace and calm, our Savior revealed to His listeners and through them to the world the central truths regarding the Christian spirit, the very heart of the Gospel. Instead of the dread voice commanding, "*Thou shalt*," as on Mount Sinai, our Lawgiver now repeats again and again, "*Blessed*," that is, "Happy," *are you*, if . . ." Already the sweetness of the New Law of grace and love was replacing the spirit of severity and fear which prevailed under the Old.

The eight beatitudes are general maxims of Christian morality and perfection, the basic principles of the kingdom of Jesus Christ as opposed to the kingdom of this world; and also to the ideas and hopes which the Chosen People had conceived regarding the kingdom of the Messias. As embodying Christian moral doctrine, the beatitudes show us both the goal of life, which is eternal happiness, and the various virtues whereby we advance toward the goal. They do not in themselves constitute perfect happiness, but they guide us toward it and give us, as it were, a foretaste of eternal bliss. It may also be said that the eight beatitudes comprise a summary of the entire Sermon on the Mount, for the discourse which follows the proclamation of them only develops their implications.

The beatitudes concern the acts of the principal virtues whereby in the life of every day we prepare our eternal happiness; yet they are possessed of such perfection that they seem to flow from the Gifts rather than from the virtues. This preparation which we daily make for eternity is both negative, that is, concerned with the removal of obstacles, and positive, that is, concerned with the performance of works which will lead us to perfection. The first three beatitudes, on poverty, meekness, and mourning, speak of



the negative preparation, because they regulate our natural inclinations toward earthly goods, anger, and pleasure. The remainder of the beatitudes envisage the goal positively, showing us how to attain blessedness or happiness relatively to our neighbor (mercy and peace) and to ourselves (hunger and thirst for justice, purity of heart, and love of the cross).

My Jesus, help me to judge good and evil according to Your standards. Grant me the light of Your grace, that I may consistently view the incidents of my life on earth under the aspect of eternity, considering as good only that which brings me closer to You and regarding as evil only that which would separate us. Enable me to understand that my true happiness, my beatitude, does not lie where the tendencies of my human nature would place it, and that from Your point of view many things which I may consider good and desirable are, in reality, injurious.

JULY 7

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### *The Poor in Spirit*



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“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3).

Poverty of spirit means detachment of the heart from earthly goods as well as actual poverty embraced by choice or supported in a Christian spirit from supernatural motives.

Lord Jesus, deign to make known to me the earthly attachments which prevent me from belonging to the number of the *poor in spirit* who are called blessed by You.

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The first law of our Savior’s kingdom does not apply to the state of poverty as opposed to the state of riches. The

blessedness it promises is offered to the poor in spirit, and therefore it is available to all, the richest as well as the poorest in this world's goods. The man who has little needs to submit to the requirements of the beatitude as truly as the man who has much. The goal to be achieved is the attitude of interior independence, a freedom of the heart from the desire of possession. Our nature has so lost its balance through the Fall that we tend to view earthly things, not as transparencies through which we see and desire God alone, but as things desirable in themselves. It is only by faith and prayer, by struggle and vigilance over ourselves that we recover our equilibrium and gain that insight into reality, whereby we use all created things only as aids in our ascent to the Creator. What our Savior demands, then, above all, is a wise and true estimate of sensible and earthly goods, which makes us independent of these goods whether we possess them or not. If they are wanting, we should neither become unhappy nor make inordinate efforts to acquire them. If they are in our possession, the heart must be kept in a state of detachment and no inordinate measures should be taken to preserve or increase them. On the contrary, if circumstances should require even an heroic observance of our vow of poverty, we should willingly and gladly embrace this degree of poverty.

To the poor in spirit our Savior promises heaven as a reward under the title *kingdom*, that is to say, an incomparable good, more magnificent and lasting than all the external goods that could be renounced. And the possession of this kingdom is certain; the divine word is its guarantee. To renounce the possession of the good things of this earth and all attachment to them, for supernatural motives, is, then, to strike a bargain with God for heaven, to which

we may lay claim by right of justice. Here on earth poverty of spirit is a foretaste of heaven, because it frees the soul from temporal cares, because it imparts to the soul facility and delight in intercourse with God in prayer, and because it secures for the soul a holy liberty in the pursuit of the only true good. We struggle to overcome our natural desires to possess, not merely that we may attain liberty of heart, but that we may gain something better, a deeper and more lasting happiness. We cannot keep both our attachment to earthly comfort and the love of God and desire of heaven. We must choose between expanding our hearts for receiving the infinite love of God or contracting them to the narrow limits of self-gratification.

O divine Savior, what gratitude we owe You for this sublime teaching! How many poor have been consoled by it and induced to embrace poverty with love; how many rich have won through it the scepter and crown of the kingdom of heaven! If I wish to have Your spirit, dear Jesus, this beatitude teaches me what I must do. Here is Your fundamental law, Your first counsel, the first step toward salvation and perfection; just as the world seeks first of all wealth and material possessions, for without these it can do nothing. Help me to keep my vow of poverty in the full meaning and spirit of Your first beatitude.

JULY 8

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### *The Meek*



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“Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth” (Mt. 5:4).  
Meekness is the virtue which regulates those inordinate move-

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ments of anger and vengeance which represent our inclination to claim our rights by force and exact requital for injustice committed against us.

Divine Savior, help me to understand the meaning of Christian meekness.

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Meekness, like poverty of spirit, implies conflict; indeed, it is in the effort to gain poverty of spirit that meekness is born. This virtue is not synonymous with want of energy, passiveness, lack of spirit or character; it is not a negative quality. The meekness that we think of with contempt is not meekness at all, but a caricature of it, a counterfeit, deriving from natural weakness and want of character or conviction. Some of the external traits of weakness and meekness are, or seem to be, identical; but the sources from which they respectively derive are as far apart as heaven and earth. One springs from divinely infused virtue, the other from the uncultivated earth of man's fallen nature. Insofar as we are weak we shall never acquire the virtue of meekness, for if we have not the strength to resist outward pressure, we shall not be able to withstand the pressure from within.

They alone who have been made strong by faith and prayer and the grace of the sacraments can acquire that self-control which yields the beautiful flower of meekness. The battle we must wage to gain this virtue is with the self-assertive, aggressive forces within our own selves; and just as our conflict will be in proportion to the strength of these powers of our nature, so also will be the brightness and beauty of the virtue that will result from our victory. Independence, determination, strength of will, anger, the sense of responsibility are all necessary equipment for the Christian, but these powers are given us to fight for God and

against our corrupt nature. The virtue of meekness represents the control of these strong forces, so that they may be directed exclusively against our one real enemy in the one battle worth waging.

Christian meekness has for recompense the earth, that is, the kingdom of the Messiah in the Church on earth and, after this life, in heaven. Only they who practice the virtue of mildness shall gain heaven for themselves and for others; because our Savior did not will to found and establish His kingdom on exterior power or military force, but upon humble and patient persistence in the path of virtue and right. Such is the character of Jesus Himself and of His Church, and such also is the way of sharing in His kingdom and of belonging to Him. Moreover, nothing so wins the esteem and love of our fellow men and the friendship of God as the practice of Christian meekness. There is in it a great dignity, a true intellectual superiority, an extraordinary mastery over the will; and it offers a manifest proof of the presence of patience, submissiveness, and humility. This is why it wins for us not only the hearts of men, but the Heart of God Himself. In this sense, also, the meek possess the earth, or the land of promise; for they are at once the favorites and the masters of earth and heaven.

Lord Jesus, when I consider the meekness of Your Sacred Heart, I think with shame and sorrow of my own heart, so unlike Yours. The least word or deed that thwarts me arouses trouble and disquiet within me. Help me to acquire Your spirit and forever to remove sinful anger and petty vengeance from my thoughts and conduct. In all contradictions help me to imitate Your own unchanging meekness.

*They Who Mourn*



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“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mt. 5:5).

This beatitude speaks of the sadness that derives from a serious and reflective spirit, able to evaluate properly the sorrows of this life and guided by temperance and reserve in the use of earthly pleasures.

Lord Jesus, help me to understand the meaning of holy sadness.

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The mourning which makes us blessed or happy is not melancholy or sentimentality or boredom or dejection; nor is it natural grief or merely the sorrow that affects us at the loss of some temporal good. It is surely not the fanatical and hypocritical sadness of the Pharisees, bewailing the humiliation of Jerusalem, nor the groaning of the entire Jewish nation under the Roman yoke. None of these is of itself an act of virtue. The sadness of the beatitude is rather a certain spirit of energy and sobriety which foregoes the vain pursuit of earthly joys and the easy surrender to the pleasures and comforts of this world. The third beatitude is, in fact, directly opposed to the quest of the joys and satisfactions of this world for their own sake and especially to the making of these gratifications one's chief aim. And so our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by St. Luke, *“Woe to you who laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.”*

Such is the eternal end toward which we strive, that possession of it compensates for all possible sacrifices and

renunciations, and brings to man's entire nature full and perfect blessedness. Our Savior's own words give us the assurance of this: "*they shall be comforted,*" He promised, that is, in body and soul, according to the measure of their mourning here below. God will be made known to them as the Comforter of those who suffer, a knowledge that is gained only upon the condition of suffering. They who have never wept will never know what it is for God to wipe away all tears from their eyes. "*Blessed are you who weep now,*" said our Savior, "*for you shall laugh*"; that is, "your joys shall never end."

The great benefits of this holy sadness are that it establishes our hearts in God and directs their aspirations toward eternal goods; that it shields us from the vanity of this world; that it increases our merits for heaven and assures us even here below of solid consolation. The practice of this beatitude opens our eyes to the perils and evils with which this life abounds both for us and for our neighbor; and it inspires in us the charitable impulse to go to the aid of our brethren who suffer precisely because of the disastrous effects of the joy that is in opposition to the third beatitude. Indulgence in this world's pleasures easily leads to dissipation of spirit, to indifference toward the things of eternity and the supernatural, even to forgetfulness of God and then, as a consequence, to all the evils which accompany these disorders. But the sadness to which Jesus refers in the third beatitude has the latent power of bringing to those who understand it and apply it, not meaningless pain, but blessedness, that is, happiness in time and eternity.

O Jesus, preserve me from that vain joy which dissipates the mind and rebels against due restraint and which causes me to lose in a short time the fruit of long effort. Help me to

remain recollected in the midst of my duties and detached from the world when I am dealing with it. To this end, with the help of Your grace which I beg our Mother of Sorrows to obtain for me, I am resolved to apply myself more earnestly to the practice of silence and prayer.

JULY 10

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### *The Seekers of Perfection*



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“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied” (Mt. 5:6).

The blessed of this beatitude are they who hunger and thirst for holiness.

Divine Master, make me understand that I can be really happy only insofar as I love virtue and hunger to practice it.

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If the first three beatitudes, basing our life upon the spirit of poverty and upon meekness and mourning, were taken alone as the foundation of the spiritual life, we should have too negative an idea of our Christian vocation. The test of the rightness of our observance of these beatitudes, however, is the fourth beatitude. If the soul who practices poverty, meekness, and mourning has kept, throughout, a wholesome appetite for spiritual things, it is in a healthy condition and ready for further development under the laws of the other beatitudes. The hunger and thirst of the fourth beatitude, then, are to be interpreted as a lively aspiration toward virtue, toward perfection, by the use of the means which our faith places at our disposal. *“Not by bread alone does man*



*live,*" was our Savior's answer to the tempter. Higher than the needs of the flesh are the hunger and thirst of the soul. Sometimes it is far better to starve our bodily nature than to feed it by disobeying any word *that comes forth from the mouth of God*. To be strict with ourselves, to make the lowest serve the highest, is true mercy. Moreover, as our lower nature is constantly refused the food it demands exclusively for itself and made to yield to a higher hunger and thirst, the less insistent its demands will become and the less ravenous its appetites.

We should be encouraged to make ever more intense efforts toward sanctity by the thought, first, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth, or the Church, is above all the kingdom of justice and supernatural holiness. Its goal is heaven; its institutions, its powers, the effects they produce, are solely designed to free us from sin and make the life of virtue and the accumulation of supernatural merits easy for us. Second, there is the compelling truth that Christian perfection, the virtues, holiness, are the only goods that can be really possessed by us, the only goods whose possession is permanently assured, by the grace of God. This is the meaning of our Savior's promise, "*they shall be satisfied.*" Nothing is more pleasing to God than our sincere aspirations toward holiness, nothing will draw down upon us more readily the abundance of His grace. Ardent desire, indeed, is one of the indispensable means of arriving at sanctity. Its sweetness facilitates our efforts, for when one is hungry all food suits the taste. That this desire should be lively, active, absorbing, is shown by the imagery of hunger and thirst under which our Savior presents the beatitude. It should motivate our whole life and inspire our thoughts, words, and actions. And for us religious who are bound

by our profession to seek after holiness, this quest for sanctity should become the exclusive aim of our entire life, not only as pursuing our true good, but also as fulfilling an obligation.

My good Jesus, deign to make clear to me my real dispositions at this moment. I fear that, because I have been in Your service for many years, I am inclined to think I may occasionally seek my ease and be less submissive, less docile and mortified, less observant of silence and recollection than in the earlier years of my religious life. Increase my desire to become holy. Grant me a renewed spirit of fervor, so that the nearer I approach the end of my life and the judgment, the more zealously I may apply myself to the work of my sanctification.

JULY 11

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### *The Merciful*



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“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt. 5:7). This beatitude regulates our dealings with the world of men, that we may do well to them and they to us.

O Jesus, fill my heart with supernatural pity for the sufferings of my fellow men in soul or body.

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The fourth beatitude left us gazing toward heaven; the fifth brings us back to earth. Gazing toward heaven even with longing will not ensure our entrance there; for hungering and thirsting for God necessarily imply working for Him. We do not come to the knowledge of God and to

union with Him through prayer alone. The fulfillment of the duties and obligations of life is also necessary, since we have not been created pure spirits like the angels, but human beings with bodies as well as souls, and in need of dwelling in close association with other human beings. Toward these, our fellow men, we have manifold duties which may not be neglected without endangering our appetite for the things of God. *For how, asks St. John, can he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?* The ties that bind us to one another are close and strong. Toward all whom we meet we have a duty not only to pity and relieve their misfortunes when we can, but to practice the virtue of mercy in such a way that we draw out the best that is in others and lead them to see that goodness is both stronger and more attractive than badness.

Like the love of neighbor, of which it is a part, mercy is exercised by thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. The world is filled with distresses of all sorts; in our own immediate environment opportunities are never wanting to our zeal for relieving the spiritual and corporal necessities of others. Christian mercy, furthermore, has in it no weakness nor softness. It does not excuse what is definitely wrong and so condone sin out of compassion for the sinner. Such apparent mercy will end not in blessedness but in its opposite. True mercy is a blend of tenderness and strength which is not blind to the reality and gravity of evil, but which maintains an unalterable tenderness toward the evildoer. Nor is mercy a merely natural pity; it is supernatural and universal, that is, shown to all without exception; for one who is pitiless toward even a single person has not the virtue of mercy. And why should we refuse mercy to others when we our-

selves are constantly receiving it both from God and even from our fellow men?

The blessing promised for showing mercy is that we shall obtain it. Above all, we shall find in God an indulgent Judge, for He is Himself the *Father of mercies*, whose ways are *mercy and truth*. The merciful He will visit with His consolations, He will hear their prayers and strengthen them in the performance of good works. This gracious protection He Himself promises through the prophet Isaias: *When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness and thy darkness shall be as the noonday. And the Lord will give thee rest continually and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail.*

O my God, I thank You for Your great mercies to my soul.

You are the Good Shepherd who leaves the flock in the desert to seek the lost sheep. You are the woman who diligently searches for her lost drachma. You are the Father overjoyed at the recovery of an erring but well-loved son. Let the memory of all Your mercies and the thought of Your present goodness lead me to love and serve You alone and my neighbor for Your sake. Let the kindness and mercy I show to others be as so many acts of gratitude to You.

## *The Clean of Heart*



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“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8).

This cleanness of heart signifies both the purifying of the heart as a prelude to the vision of God and that cleanness of mind which is a kind of complement to the sight of God and the result of the Gift of understanding.

Divine Savior, make me worthy of that knowledge of You which is granted to the pure of heart.

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Purity means not only freedom from the sins of the flesh, but that purity of the senses, of the heart, of thought and intention, that simplicity and uprightness, which seeks God directly and solely, Its attainment involves suppressing self-love more and more in order to turn the energies of our whole being toward God; for it is by union with God that this purity receives its luster, just as crystal shines in its full clarity when it is penetrated by the rays of the sun. Negatively, then, purity consists in freedom from all sin; positively considered, it means union with God. The motive for trying to acquire the purity of the sixth beatitude is given us in the promise of the Savior, “*they shall see God.*” These words signify primarily the direct vision of God in eternity where the pure of heart shall see Him face to face. The necessary condition for seeing God is to be clean with a purity of which not even the greatest saints can form an adequate idea.

The whole of Christian perfection is comprised in the purity of the sixth beatitude, for its observance requires a

heart that is free from all affection that is unrelated to the love of God. It is His will that we unite all our diverse loves in one, single, undivided love of Him, so that His love purifies and sanctifies all other affection. As long as there remains in the soul any admixture of self-love, it cannot be raised to the Beatific Vision. Even if we die in the state of grace, we must still pass through the ordeal of purgatory and be to some extent deprived of our Supreme Good, until we are entirely cleansed of all impurity and are entirely spotless in His eyes. Only if our hearts are truly pure will we be admitted at death with no delay to the vision of God.

How important it is for us, then, to acquire while we are still on earth not only the purity represented by sanctifying grace, but also that in which divine love is unstained by even the shadow of self-seeking! One result of our perfect observance of the first commandment would be our readiness to enter into eternal union with God at the very moment He calls us to Himself. Every disposition in us which would cause even the slightest delay means imperfect obedience to the first and greatest commandment. Mortification of the heart, which seems so difficult to practice, opens the gate of heaven to us and leads us directly to eternal joy. We shall see God only when our heart is purified, and our vision of Him will be perfect in proportion as our heart is pure. Even on earth pure hearts have a foretaste of eternal happiness, because God communicates to them more abundantly the treasures of His knowledge, love, and joy. He is drawn to the pure by love, for in the mirror of a pure heart He contemplates His own purity and His own beauty. And so, on earth the clean of heart are the favorites and the well-beloved of God; and in heaven they will behold Him as He is.

O God, grant me a great esteem and desire for perfect purity in Your sight. Strengthen me in the practice of mortification, temperance, and detachment. Dear Mary and Joseph, let your holy names be on my lips and in my heart when I arise in the morning and when I retire at night, so that under your protection I may serve God as you did in perfect virginal purity of heart, soul, and body.

JULY 13

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### *The Peacemakers*



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“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt. 5:9).

The perfection of this beatitude is the establishing of peace in the heart of our neighbor, whether between him and God or with his fellow men.

O Jesus, make me worthy of being the messenger of Your peace.

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This beatitude is not for the beginner in the spiritual life. Only if we have learned the lessons of the preceding six beatitudes shall we succeed in this one. Our previous training should have taught us three things: that God must ever be first in our thoughts as our true End and the End of all created things; that in order to live our true life we must practice inner self-control; that we must blend compassion and justice in our dealings with our fellow men, while, at the same time, cleanness of heart keeps ever before us the standards and aims befitting the ideal of the Beatific Vision. Moreover, our efforts must first be directed to the establish-

ing of our own peace, both with ourselves and with others. Our interior and exterior peace is the fruit of charity; by the former we love God above all things, submitting and referring all our endeavors and aspirations to His will; by the latter, we love our neighbor as ourselves and, consequently, his will as our own. Thus, we bring our will into accord with that of our neighbor where this harmony has in it nothing contrary to the divine will. The efforts to preserve our own interior and exterior peace constitute the peacemaking spirit, the specific perfection of which consists in striving to bring about peace between God and our fellow men or in the relations of our fellow creatures with one another.

But this beatitude is not uttered for those who would do anything or surrender anything merely for the sake of peace. The peacemaker of the beatitude knows that he can make no terms with sin or with anything that is false or untrue; on this point there can be no surrender, even if the whole world were to be gained by it. If we are to lead others to God, it must be by helping them to rise to the truth and not by altering or softening truths that may seem unpalatable; for such compromises cannot be the foundation of lasting peace. But the peacemaker must know men as well as God. He must have mastered the beatitude of the merciful as well as that of the pure in heart. Patience, and large-minded sympathy should be traits of his character. He must know how to give due consideration to differences in circumstances, temperament, education. In the true peacemaker there is a blend of firmness and gentleness, an entire faithfulness to God, combined with that knowledge of men which is to be gained only by love. This spirit of peacemaking imparts to us a likeness with the divine.



By establishing His reign within us, it makes us true children of our Father, whom St. Paul calls *the God of peace*; it makes us true brethren of Jesus who is the Prince of peace and worthy members of the Church, which is the kingdom of the peace of God.

O Jesus, grant me that ineffable peace of which You are the Source. Help me to live habitually in the spirit of Your peace with myself and my neighbor, and to be also Your faithful instrument in bringing to others that lasting peace and tranquillity which You alone can impart to me.

JULY 14

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### *The Persecuted*



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“Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:10).

This beatitude assures all Christians who endure persecution in God’s cause the possession of the kingdom of heaven, if they suffer with humility, love, and constancy.

Lord Jesus, grant me to attain to the perfection of Your eighth beatitude.

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By persecution our Savior means all manifestations of hostility, whether of sentiments, words, or actions. This He Himself indicates in the words recorded by St. Luke: “*Blessed shall you be when men hate you, and when they shut you out, and reproach you, and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*” And in St. Matthew we read, “*Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you and,*

*speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake.*" This hostility, however, will be undeserved on the part of the servants of Jesus Christ and unjustified on the part of their persecutors. Also, before it can be truly called such, the persecution must be directed against the followers of Christ in a cause involving acts of justice, of Christian virtue, or of faith, that are being performed or defended for His sake. A natural motive does not entitle one to the promise of this beatitude, much less the commission of a fault that would provoke or justify the opposition.

Although there is no need of seeking after persecution or of exposing oneself to it, when it does come to us it should be accepted and not evaded. Moreover, it should be endured with patience, in a spirit of faith and humility, without hatred, without the desire of taking vengeance upon one's persecutors, and without rebellion against God who permits it. We should even make a strong effort to receive persecution with joy and eagerness, as a great privilege. Our Savior Himself tells us to regard it as a great good, a blessing, for He says to those who live under the law of the eighth beatitude, "*Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in heaven.*" While we may not be asked to give the testimony of our blood, the words of St. Paul, *All who want to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*, show that persecution is ever active and that it results inevitably from the fact that one is living in opposition to the spirit of the world.

There is a close connection between this last beatitude and the first. The reward in both cases is the same: "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The subject matter of both is also the same, namely, our external circumstances and surroundings. But while the first beatitude implies a struggle against

the attraction of external goods, the last contemplates a very different kind of contest. It is not against the attraction of creatures that the battle must here be waged, but the reverse. The things we once loved so much and strove against victoriously have now, so to speak, risen against us. Failing to win us, they now would wound us. This last and final test by the fire of persecution is a confirmation of all the beatitudes. One whose training in the other beatitudes has done its work can now stand alone, with all the world against him, and be happy. This is not because he is indifferent to human appreciation and affection, but because he has turned to God his Comforter and has learned to see the true value and proportion of things in Him. The light of heaven is about him and he fights in the sweet companionship of One who will never forsake him, One who discloses to him the joys and the endless vistas of the larger and nobler life in the kingdom of heaven.

Help me to understand, good Jesus, that persecution received and endured in the spirit of Your last beatitude is precious, especially because of the kingdom of heaven. In the brightness of this promised reward all the shadows of the struggle on earth fade away into nothingness. O divine Savior, grant me, together with Your Apostles and Your Church, a share in Your sufferings, even to death if this be Your will, that I may share also Your everlasting triumph.

*Anger Under the New Law*



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“You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Thou shalt not kill’; and that whoever shall murder shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, ‘Thou fool!’ shall be liable to the fire of Gehenna” (Mt. 5:21, 22).

Having just declared that He came not to destroy but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, Jesus mentions particular points of the Old Law to show how they are to be perfected under the New.

Good Jesus, help me to cleanse my heart of all uncharitableness.

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The Law punished only the actual commission of homicide; the Gospel, Jesus declares, would demand atonement for anger yielded to in thought, for the desire merely, to injure another. And not only physical violence, but even such external offenses as hostile words would have their penalty. Our Savior’s rigorous condemnation of these sins is reflected in the chastisements He appoints for them. Jewish law brought a man who was guilty of murder before the local tribunal, which was empowered to hand down the death sentence. Jesus, the Master and Author of the Law, would punish anger, which is the first step toward murder and which, even though it lies hidden in the heart, may bring death to the soul and so incur capital punishment in the spiritual order. The anger referred to here is not the just and holy wrath inspired by zeal for God’s interests or

for our neighbor's amendment, but the anger referred to by St. John in the words, *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer*. If anger finds expression in insulting language, the offense becomes so serious that it is a case, not for the ordinary court, but for the highest council of the nation, the Sanhedrin. And if anger vent itself further in injurious language, the penalty is Gehenna, which term seems here directly to signify hell.

The great importance which our Savior attaches to His precept on fraternal charity is revealed not so much by the chastisement reserved for the guilty, as by the relation that is established between the offenses He enumerates and the actual murder forbidden by the Old Law. These offenses can lead to murder; from anger within, unresisted and even willfully harbored, one passes to words and actions. The perfect law should deal with causes and occasions of grave sins as well as with their actual commission; it ought to regulate the whole man, interiorly, within his heart, and also externally, in his actions. Such was to be the perfection of the law of the Gospel. Animosity, resentment, bitterness, rancour are all banished by the Christian spirit. Amiability and kindness are of such great importance that without them the holiest practices of religion cannot be pleasing to God.

Our Savior tells us that if we are harboring anger or spite against our brother, it were better to leave our offering and try to re-establish concord with him. This duty is so important that it is the indispensable condition for the favorable reception of our offering. And as a means of avoiding the punishment reserved for transgressors, Jesus bids us be reconciled with our brother while we are *with him on the way*, that is, while we are still on this earth. How the soul breathes and soars in following the Savior! It is holiness of

soul that He requires. He enters into the most secret recesses of our being to cleanse and purify. All wicked thoughts, evil desires, lies, covering themselves with formulas of justification, all the rottenness with which the whited sepulcher of the pharisaical soul is filled, Jesus rejects and banishes from our souls.

“O almighty and merciful Lord, favorably consider our prayers and deliver our hearts from the temptation of evil thoughts, that we may deserve to become worthy dwelling places of the Holy Spirit” (Roman Missal).

JULY 16

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*Our Lady of Mount Carmel*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 823)

JULY 17

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*Love of Neighbor*



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“You have heard that it was said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and shalt hate thy enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies” (Mt. 5:43, 44).

Love of neighbor is a commandment of the Old as well as of the New Law. In the Sermon on the Mount our Savior indicated certain particulars wherein this precept is perfected under the New Dispensation.

Divine Master, lead me by Your grace to a full supernatural observance of Your second great commandment.

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For the pagans and even for the people of Israel, "neighbor" meant "relative," "friend," or, in its broadest signification, "fellow countryman"; but not "foreigner," and certainly not "enemy." Our Savior removed these boundary lines. He opened to us the whole world and said to us, as it were, "Your neighbor is every human being. Every man is your neighbor and your brother, because you are all children of the same heavenly Father." If this motive of the common Fatherhood of God were annulled, every man would no longer be our brother. Fraternal charity which does not rest ultimately upon the paternity of God is an illusion. True love of our neighbor is impossible if it is not inspired by the remembrance and the love of God. The precept of the New Law on fraternal charity forbids us to bear hatred in our hearts against anyone, even our enemies, or to wish others ill, or to refuse them the ordinary evidences of civility. As for showing special signs of charity to those who have offended us or who are hostile to us, this is not a matter of precept, but a counsel of perfection which we may find abundantly exemplified in the lives of the saints. God Himself, who makes the sun to shine on the evil as well as the good and the rain to fall equally on the fields of the just and of sinners, is proposed by our Savior as a model: "*You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Our charity will be like that of our heavenly Father if we can "love our enemies, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who persecute us."

"*Do not judge that you may not be judged.*" Legitimate legal judgment is not forbidden by these words of Jesus,

nor a private judgment that is validly motivated and bears upon what is evident and manifest. The forbidden judgments are those private judgments that are unjust and to which we are moved by a want of charity and an exaggerated esteem of ourselves. The exceptional force with which the sin of rash judgment is denounced by our Savior's next words should certainly deter us from committing it. He adds: "*For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.*" Moreover, we are not in a position to make a just judgment of others; we have neither sufficient light nor the necessary holiness for this. Indeed, a rash judgment is at the very least as culpable as the fault for which we condemn our neighbor, and very likely it is more culpable, as the comparison of the beam and the mote recorded by St. Matthew would imply.

As an essentially positive command regarding the love of neighbor, our Savior established the general principle that we should do to others as we desire them to do to us. We should treat others as we desire to be treated: "*Therefore all things, whatever you would that men should do to you, even so do you also to them.*" The liberality with which we should interpret this precept is indicated by our Savior's counsel that we should give our brother not only what he asks but, more generously, more than he asks, that is to say, *good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.*

Jesus, my Redeemer, how truly royal and divine is Your law! To what sublime heights it would elevate my soul! Enable me by Your grace to practice habitually forgetfulness of self and generosity in word and deed toward my neighbor, whether friend or enemy. To live so on this earth, elevating and transforming thus the less noble instincts of my nature, would surely be to



reproduce in myself Your living image and to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

JULY 18

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## *Fraternal Charity*



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“So there abide faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Although it does not exist here below without faith and hope, charity is the greatest of the three theological virtues. It disposes us to love God above all things for His own sake, in the way in which He loves Himself, and to love our neighbor, that is, all men, in God and for God.

O God, grant that I may love You daily more and more in loving my neighbor in You and for Your sake.

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To follow the precept of Jesus Christ on fraternal charity we must pay particular attention to the practice of this virtue as it is described by St. Paul. Charity is patient, is kind, he tells us; that is, we should bear with the faults and defects of others, suppress all impulses toward revenge; and, in short, suffer all things from others, but take care that others have nothing to suffer from us. We should be always reasonable, obliging, civil.

*Charity does not envy:* we must not be jealous of others' advantages; but when we see that others are more blessed than we in spiritual or temporal goods, or that they possess more desirable natural gifts, we should wish them even greater good fortune.

*Charity . . . is not pretentious:* as pride and vainglory most readily bring about the destruction of community spirit, so humility is the basis of all fraternal generosity. When all the members of a house are humble, there are likely to be few sins against charity. And where charity is not violated, a religious house is as a forecourt of heaven.

*Charity is not puffed up:* that is, not arrogant or contemptuous of others. Where charity reigns, talents are used for the glory of God and others' benefit, not for personal honor or fame.

*is not ambitious:* manifestations of preference or positions of authority should not be desired. We must not expect extra consideration nor make known that we receive it when it is given us.

*is not self-seeking:* our neighbor should be served with truly Christian affection, sincere attachment, unselfish zeal, and with no wish for a return of service.

*is not provoked:* charity does not give way to anger nor a desire for revenge because of injuries received. We should be willing to admonish others or explain ourselves when this is necessary, but always without passion.

*thinks no evil:* the best possible interpretation is to be given to our neighbor's actions. We should never be distrustful nor suspicious, never form aversions or rash judgments. We are not permitted to approve of what is wrong, but we should be slow to believe there is anything wrong.

*does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth:* we should be sorry when we see others do wrong or when they are blamed and humiliated; but we should thank God when good is done and receives a just reward.

*Charity . . . bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things:* good intentions must be readily

trusted and whatever tends to the justification of our neighbor should be received with eagerness and simplicity. When we cannot prudently trust another or find justification for his actions, we should pray for him and hope that he will soon amend.

In the interest of both charity and humility, everyone should look on others as superior to himself and give them the respect and honor due their station. Each one should see in his neighbor the image of God and honor the guardian angel attending him.

O God, grant that I may grow daily in the practice of fraternal charity. Fill me with thoughts and feelings favorable to my brethren and permit not that I should ever look upon them except with the eyes of faith, as the work of Your hands, made in Your image and likeness. Show them to me in the Sacred Heart of Your Son, cleansed by His blood, fed with His sacred body, and destined one day to participate in the unspeakable and everlasting happiness of the Beatific Vision.

JULY 19

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### *False Prophets*



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“Beware of false prophets” (Mt. 7:16).

Near the close of His great discourse on the Mount of the Beatitudes, Jesus warned His hearers to be on their guard against false teachers, because they could endanger their salvation, which, at best, can be achieved only with difficulty.

Divine Savior, show me wherein especially I should amend my life, so that I may become competent and worthy to assist others.

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The prime qualification, the infallible mark, which guarantees the right to teach others, Jesus tells us in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, is conformity to the will of God. The degree of this conformity in one's life and works reveals one's true personality. Our words and actions have their roots deep in our thoughts; so that, if the former are to be in harmony with the divine good pleasure, we must always in our thoughts consult the will of God in preference to our own. Then Jesus developed His theme by the comparison of the tree. It is by its fruits that we distinguish a good tree from a bad one. Thorns and thistles cannot produce grapes and figs. Consequently, if our lives are to be conformed to the will of God as it is revealed in the Gospel, they must carry the impress of the teachings of the Gospel, adhered to from deep interior conviction and with seriousness of purpose.

The real gravity and seriousness of this life had just been alluded to by our Savior in the words preceding His warning against false teachers: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter that way. How narrow the gate and close the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it."* To restrain and discipline the liberty of the flesh and the senses is one of the characteristics of the Christian religion, whose laws in no way favor the tendencies of corrupt nature. To be convinced of this, one needs only to recall the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. Self-renunciation and the serious disciplining of all unruly tendencies are with good reason the marks by which we recognize the true Christian. Our irregular appetites and our self-love which urge us to seek the gratification of our natural inclinations by avoiding humiliations and crosses may seem to us "harm-

less lambs," but they are in reality *ravenous wolves*.

There may be also, exteriorly, companions who by example or advice lead us to live less strictly or to take less account of those who have authority over us. It is difficult to detect the snares in the cravings of self-love and in the suggestions of such companions, for they entice us into evil under the appearance of good. We are persuaded, for example, to seek notice and applause, so that we may work more efficiently for the good of our neighbor; or to allow ourselves unnecessary relaxations of the Rule, so that our health and strength may not be impaired; or to neglect our spiritual duties under the pretext of the demands of our work. It is only by the light of faith and by prayer and the study of the Gospel that we shall be able to unmask these deceits so flattering to self-love; and only with the help of grace shall we resist them victoriously. Let us ask our good Master to give us light to know His will and strength to accomplish it.

"O God, whose providence in the ordering of all things never fails, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all harmful things and give us those things which are profitable to us" (Roman Missal).

JULY 20

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### *Self-Deception*



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"But he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21).

See Jesus on the Mount of the Beatitudes speaking to the crowds and listen to His words.

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O Jesus, grant me the grace of performing my actions in the way that will merit a recompense from You.

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*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'"* our Savior warns us, *"shall enter the kingdom of heaven."* It is not enough, then, to sigh after heaven, not enough even to recognize in Jesus Christ our Lord and Master and to ask for His grace. We must also respond to grace and put a strong hand to the work of doing the will of God as He makes it known to us. Fruitless desires, idle prayers, will not open to us the gates of heaven; works also are necessary. But let us not deceive ourselves with regard to these works. Many which appear estimable to us and to human eyes are valueless in the eyes of God. And even assuming that they are really good works, they must also be rightly performed; that is, in the love of God, according to His will, and for His sake.

In the love of God: that is, in the state of grace. A passion that is nourished in the heart, a secret impurity, unresisted feelings of hatred or aversion, jealousy of one's neighbor, serious scandal, calumny, or any grave injury that has not been repaired—a single mortal sin which has not been atoned for and effaced can annul all the good that we do. And if we present ourselves to Jesus, offering Him the good works done in this state, He tells us in this instruction the response we may expect to hear from Him: *"Depart from me, you workers of iniquity."* In these words, first uttered in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed Himself for the first time as Sovereign Judge.

According to His will: Works most holy in themselves, most laborious, most brilliant, that are performed not in accordance with the duties of our state, against obedience, or

without authority, are useless for heaven and even positively evil. On the other hand, they who confine themselves strictly within the limits of the divine will for them, according to their Rule on obedience, even if solely to works the most common and inconspicuous to the eyes of men, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven and shall receive a full reward. How instructive and consoling is this truth!

For His sake: "*Many will say to me in that day,*" said our Savior, "*‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name and cast out devils in thy name and work many miracles in thy name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you.’*" Works of benevolence, the conversion of sinners, miracles even, will be wasted effort as regards a heavenly recompense if these actions are done through vanity, self-interest, or ambition. And if we appear before Him so, Jesus will declare that He does not know us. Those whom He recognizes as His own are they who have no other purpose except to do His will in doing their duty, to make Him known and loved, and so promote His glory. Let us ask our Lord to purify us from all defilement in word or deed and say to Him with the prophet Daniel:

And now we follow You with all our heart and we fear You and seek Your face. Put us not to confusion, but deal with us according to Your wonderful works and give glory to Your name, O Lord.

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*The Centurion's Servant*

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"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Mt. 8:8).

The calling of the Gentiles, of which the Magi were the first fruits, is again offered to our consideration in the faith and humility of the centurion of Capharnaum.

Lord Jesus, perfect my dispositions of faith, humility, and trust.

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The centurion's request, like that of the leper whose cure immediately precedes this incident in St. Matthew's Gospel, is made with humble deference: "*Lord, my servant is lying sick in the house, paralyzed, and is grievously afflicted.*" Moreover, he did not even venture to come and present his request in person, but *he sent to him elders of the Jews, beseeching him to come and save his servant.* These Jews in their zeal went further, perhaps, than the centurion wished, in entreating our Savior to come with them, for the centurion had not intended that Jesus should trouble Himself to come to his house. But Jesus replied to the envoys of the centurion with spontaneous and compassionate charity, "*I will come and cure him.*" These words would seem to be deliberately designed to elicit from the centurion his sublime act of faith: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.*" So confident was this man in the power of Jesus that he was convinced His presence was not necessary for the cure of his servant and that a word



or an act of His will would suffice. This conviction the centurion expressed in his soldier's language: "If I who am only a man can give orders that are obeyed," he said to Jesus in effect, "how much more can You, whose will no creature can resist, utter the powerful and efficacious word!"

We may contrast the perfect confidence of this centurion with the imperfect faith of the royal official of Capharnaum of whom St. John tells us. His confidence in Jesus was strong enough to take him from the sickroom of his son to ask the Savior's help, but he insisted that Jesus go to his house. "He wishes to hurry Christ along with him," remarks St. John Chrysostom, "as if our Lord could not raise his son after death." The faith of the centurion, however, so filled our divine Savior with admiring approval that He gave expression to His joy even before He pronounced the healing words. This Roman soldier and many like him, Jesus told the crowd who was following Him, would be reputed as the true sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while they who were the sons of the patriarchs according to the flesh, would be cast out of the feasting chamber *into the darkness outside*. The Church places the words of the centurion upon the lips of all the faithful when they are about to receive Holy Communion; for these words express the dispositions which are necessary to receive the Sacrament worthily, namely, humility of heart, deep faith, unwavering trust.

"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

*The Widow of Naim*



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“And as he drew near the gate of the town, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow; and a large gathering from the town was with her” (Lk. 7:12).

After curing the servant of the Roman centurion, our Savior left Capharnaum and journeying inland by a southwest course came to the town of Naim.

Divine Savior, grant me a continual increase of Your divine life, for without You I can do nothing.

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Our Savior approached Naim accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd. Near the gate of the town He met a funeral procession. The mourners were at the head with the flute and cymbal players; then, immediately before the plain uncovered coffin borne by four men, walked the widowed mother of the deceased, weeping inconsolably. The dead youth, her only son, lay on the bier enveloped in his shroud, which left only his face uncovered. Finally, there was the cortege of friends and neighbors. Our Savior had been the silent witness of many a funeral, but what now moved His sacred heart was the sad figure of the bereaved and sorrowing mother. Perhaps He thought of His own Mother; perhaps, He thought of the day when Mary would accompany Him to His tomb. *And the Lord seeing her,* writes St. Luke, *had compassion on her and said, “Do not weep.”* These words had doubtless been repeated to this woman many times, but now that they were spoken by

Jesus, they had that efficacy which belongs to His words alone. He approached the bier and touched it, the bearers halted, and He said to the corpse, "*Young man, I say to thee, arise.*" At this simple word from the Lord of life and death, the young man sat up and began to speak.

There had been and there were to be others who restored the dead to life, such as Elias, Eliseus, St. Peter, and St. Paul; but with what a difference in the manner of accomplishment! These men of God prayed and implored and laid their own body over that of the corpse. Jesus spoke only a word of command: "*I say to thee, arise*"; easily, calmly, as though raising the dead were the most ordinary of actions. And what great tenderness there is in our all-powerful Savior! He had a right to this life which He had just restored, but He did not claim His right. He gave the young man to his mother. We can readily picture the joy and gratitude of this woman upon receiving so precious a gift. What love for the Savior must have filled the hearts of both mother and son from this time on!

Twice in the course of her year the Church proposes this Gospel for our meditation. She would remind us in this way that we are to see in the sorrowing widow of Naim a figure of the Church grieving over those of her children who are dead in sin, so that we may pray with her for their restoration to life. We should pray also that the supernatural life which is in the Church may continue to flow abundantly to us all and produce its fruits; namely, the works of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul admonishes the Galatians: *If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.* The works of the Spirit which St. Paul especially recommends in this Epistle are prudent distrust of ourselves and charity toward our neighbor, particularly those who are of the household of the faith.

“Let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thee, govern it evermore by Thy help” (Roman Missal)

JULY 23

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*Death in the Lord*



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“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them” (Apoc. 14:13).

Represent to yourself a religious on her deathbed.

Lord Jesus, grant that I may die the death of the just.

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There is no bitterness in the death of a good religious; for her last hours are made happy both by the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. Such a religious soul herself could best tell us of the consolations that are hers at the end of her life. If she were to express her thoughts and feelings at this supreme moment, what would she say to us? Would she not speak somewhat as follows? How thankful I am now that I have served my Lord faithfully throughout my religious life and that I have loved His law above all else! At last I see that the way of the cross is the royal road, and what I have sowed in tears I reap now with joy. What sweetness there is in the remembrance of the penance and humiliations that accompanied the observance of my vows and my Rule! But of whatever vain joys I permitted myself, of the shadow of honor and reputation with which I fed my vanity, nothing remains now but regret.

Upon entering religion this soul made a sincere and complete oblation of herself. She realized that as a Christian and still more as a follower of Jesus in the way of the counsels, she could be pleasing to her divine Master only by imitating Him in the life of self-abnegation that He led while on earth. And so from the time of her novitiate and especially after her profession, she sought the way of mortification and self-denial for the love of God. Now, in her last hour, while she is not unmindful of the words of Ecclesiastes: *Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred*, her soul is filled with happy expectation. The ground of her confidence is not her own works and merits, but the mercy of Him whose loving kindness she knows through the graces she has received from Him. Yet she finds also a sweet consolation in the echo of the years of her good religious life, which says to her, as it were, "Claim, O virtuous soul, the palm merited by your victories, since your conscience testifies that you have fought the good fight."

During her life the fervent religious thinks with apprehension of her eternal salvation, but at the moment of death her fears are succeeded by a sweet confidence. God reveals Himself to her not as a Judge but as a good and merciful Father. He grants her a foretaste of the ineffable joys which are to be her portion. She contemplates in advance the splendors of the eternal city. She hears the words of her Spouse: *"Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* Her bodily members have been anointed with the holy oils, God is in her heart, the crucifix which she holds in her hands reminds her of the divine mercies. Like the aged Simeon she may raise her eyes to heaven and say, *"Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy*

*word in peace.*" The moment which has so long been the object of her ardent desire has arrived. The last prayers and blessings are pronounced, the soul at last bursts its bonds, and with her last breath this fervent religious begins her new life in a glorious eternity.

"O Jesus, while I adore Your dying breath, I beseech You to receive mine. Being uncertain whether I shall have command of my senses when I depart from this world, I offer You now my last agony and all the sorrows of my passing. Since You are my Father and my Savior, I give back my soul into Your hands. Grant that the last beat of my heart may be an act of pure love toward You" (*Raccolta*).

JULY 24

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### *The Baptist in Prison*



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"But when John had heard in prison of the works of Christ" (Mt. 11:2).

The details of the Precursor's arrest are not recorded in the Gospel, but we may suppose that he gave himself up freely and with dignity, although, doubtless, he could have protected himself by appealing to the people.

O St. John the Baptist, obtain for me the grace of suffering meritoriously.

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He who had been so powerful in word and work now had his voice muffled by the walls of a prison. The hands which had baptized thousands, and even the Messiah Himself, were now fettered. St. John the Baptist's glorious ministry had

lasted scarcely a year before it was forcibly checked by the whim of a most shameful passion. Yet, under the harsh conditions of his imprisonment, the spirit of St. John had lost none of its nobility and inflexible firmness. He was happy to endure captivity, for had he not said that Jesus must increase and that he himself must decrease? Moreover, even from his prison he managed to carry out his mission of manifesting the Messias.

All the saints have found glory and happiness in suffering for Jesus. The Apostles left the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. St. Paul gloried in the cross and in dangers and humiliations. St. Andrew embraced the cross of his martyrdom with joy. St. Ignatius of Antioch invited the beasts to grind him between their teeth that he might be made the bread of Christ. Should not we, then, at least endure with patience the little that we are asked to suffer? Surely it is an honor to be permitted to imitate our Savior and His saints. Moreover, suffering tests and proves the soul. All our courage, spiritual energy, and magnanimity are called forth by it. Virtue never appears so truly admirable as when it is put to the proof by adversity. This is why St. Paul says that *strength is made perfect in weakness*.

What stronger evidence could there be of the value of suffering and the esteem God has for it than the manner in which He allowed His adorable Son to be treated during His passion? Surely we shall not look for a different way to heaven for ourselves, or try to win souls to Christ by some other means than that He Himself chose for our redemption. Our Savior did not bring the lost sheep back to the fold by His miracles, but by His bitter passion and





and well-organized work of learning  
in the garden. It was intended that  
the garden should be a place where  
the children could learn to work. It  
was to be a place of learning for the  
children of all levels and it was  
to be a place where the children could  
learn to work together. This was  
the aim of the garden. It was  
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sacraments of Jesus Christ. Our Savior's answer was also prudent. He did not consider that the moment had come as yet for declaring expressly and in public that He was the Messiah. Jesus did not precipitate events. Each advance in His revelation of Himself was to have its own time; meanwhile, He left to men of good will the task of seeking and finding Him.

You are He who is to come, O Jesus! We look for no other. We were blind and You gave us sight; we were lame, You made us walk; the leprosy of sin disfigured us, You made us clean; we were deaf, You opened our ears to Your words; we were poor and had none to care for us and You came to us with Your divine aid and consolation. May these benefits continue more and more fully to be the blessings of Your coming to our souls, O merciful Jesus!

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JULY 26

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*St. Anne, Mother of Our Lady*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 828)

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JULY 27

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*Jesus, a Stone of Stumbling*



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“And blessed is he who is not scandalized in me” (Mt. 11:6).  
From His response to the disciples of John, Jesus Himself draws

an inference which applies to them, to the Pharisees, to the people, to all alike.

Divine Redeemer, make me understand better the mystery of Your voluntary humiliations and grant me the grace to endure my own with resignation and even with love.

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The Jews, deceived by their literal interpretation of the prophecies and by their too natural desires, waited for a Messiah who would be a powerful king, and whose armies would free them from the Roman yoke and conquer the world. But when the Messiah came, far from surrounding Himself with armed might and the purple, He showed only disdain for human glory and continually taught and practiced self-abnegation. The Jews concluded, therefore, that He was not the One promised by the prophets, and thus He became to them an occasion of scandal. It was partly to destroy this false idea of the Messiah in the minds of his followers that St. John the Baptist had sent two of his disciples to interrogate Jesus. He wished them to learn from our Savior's own lips that He Himself, who came to heal and console, and above all to preach the Gospel to the poor, was in very truth the One who was to come.

*"And blessed is he,"* added our Savior, after His paraphrase of Isaias' prophecy of Him, *"who is not scandalized in me,"* that is, by My poverty, My lowliness, and the contradictions that attend Me. Jesus is in fact the ruin of those who let themselves be turned aside from Him by the difficulty of walking in His footsteps or by the austerity of His doctrine and example. Holy Simeon had said, *"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted."* The pagans as well as the Jews, however, were scandalized by the teaching and

the humiliations of the Redeemer. They regarded His cross and His gospel as folly and, after the Resurrection, they persecuted Him in His Apostles and martyrs. Isaias also had foretold that He would be as *a stone of stumbling . . .* against which *very many of them shall stumble and fall and shall be broken in pieces*; and David spoke of Him as *the stone which the builders rejected*.

So often it is earthly happiness and earthly victories that men ask of God and wait to receive from Him. They are scandalized by a God who gives only virtue and supernatural strength and who promises a kingdom, but only later and for heaven. How many there are today, even in the Church, even among religious, who are in reality inwardly shocked by the lowly poverty, the self-denial, and the universal charity of the Gospel! Let us be on our guard that the persistent pressure of the world in which we live and work may not dim our spiritual vision and cause us to lose a just appreciation of eternal values. Our own self-love also blurs our insight into spiritual realities, by prompting us to try to fix with our regard other things along with God.

Whence comes it, O my God, that You permit Your adorable Son to have even today so many enemies and gainsayers and so few true servants? Is it in this way, perhaps, that we shall appreciate better the grace given us to remain faithful to Your teachings? Oh, make my faith more living, my hope firmer, my charity more ardent, my gratitude more generous, and my zeal more active in serving and following You, that I may atone for the ingratitude of so many souls.

*Our Savior's Eulogy of the Baptist*



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“Amen I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Mt. 11:11).

After the departure of John's disciples, our Savior gave a magnificent public eulogy of His Precursor. Under the circumstances a eulogy of the Baptist was peculiarly suitable, since the crowd, hearing the question put to Jesus by John's disciples concerning His identity, might easily have misunderstood it as implying a weakening of the Baptist's faith.

O Jesus, teach me to be wholehearted and generous in recognizing the good done by others.

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In His eulogy of St. John our Savior especially praised his austerity, which He contrasted with the luxury and effeminacy of John's royal persecutor: *“But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft garments are in the houses of kings.”* Jesus alluded also to his firmness of character and his unshakable constancy. He called attention to John's mission and declared its superiority over that of the prophets, for John was the immediate Precursor, the Elias of the first coming of the Messiah, charged with preparing His way. John himself, indeed, had been the subject of prophecy, for Isaias had foretold him as the voice of one crying in the desert: *“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the wilderness the paths of our God.”* Malachias had said of him, *Behold I*

*send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face.*

Finally, Jesus summed up the whole excellence of John by declaring that among those born of women, no one was greater either in his mission or in his sanctity. Other prophets of the Old Testament may have been equal to St. John the Baptist, but none was his superior. In the New Testament, however, no such comparison can be made. Although the ordinary Christian may be inferior in holiness to the just of the Old Dispensation, he is superior to them in dignity, because by Baptism, which incorporates him into Christ, he is made another Christ. From this point of view, the least member of the Mystical Body of Christ becomes greater than John.

In rendering this testimony to His Precursor, Jesus proposed to honor him and reward him for his zeal and for the selflessness with which he had borne witness to the Messiah. In addition, He intended to confirm in this way the teachings of John and bring the people to accept them. We should observe also the delicacy with which Jesus refrained from praising John in the presence of his disciples. Our Savior will not praise indiscreetly even when the praise is well merited.

O Jesus, how admirable and instructive are Your relations with Your holy Precursor and his with You! He sent to You, the Lamb of God, Your first disciples. He thought of himself as only a *voice of one crying in the desert* and declared that he should decrease, but You should increase. He devoted all his energies toward bringing his disciples to a better knowledge of You. And You, in Your turn, gave to him magnificent public praise. You canonized him, as it were, while he was still living on earth, with Your own divine lips. What a contrast there is here with the disputes and rivalries in which we, the servants of the same God, sometimes allow ourselves to indulge!

*The Sweetness of Serving Jesus Christ*



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“My yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt. 11:30).

After His eulogy of St. John the Baptist, Jesus invited His hearers to devote themselves to His service.

O my Savior, perfect me in divine love and enlarge my heart that I may run in the way of Your commandments.

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The world regards the service of God as painful and His yoke as a heavy burden; and so it fears to accept the invitation of our Savior. Yet could anything be truer than that the service of God is full of sweetness, and that all our happiness lies only there? Our Savior was not claiming, however, that the natural man would find His yoke easy and His burden light. Pride and self-love cannot find sweetness in the yoke of Jesus Christ, since it is with the object of destroying these passions that He lays it upon us. But bearing the yoke of the Savior brings the gift of His help. It costs us dear to overcome ourselves, but the conquest won by the aid of His grace yields unspeakable joy and every fresh victory in this warfare is a new delight. It is sweet to become master of one's senses, mind, and will and to use our liberty in a manner pleasing to God, conformed to reason, and satisfying to conscience. The yoke of Christ borne faithfully will inevitably secure for us this mastery. But when the love of ease takes possession of us, there is a visible departure of greatness of soul, generosity of heart, love of zeal, and courage in self-sacrifice! O happy self-denial, which begets the peace and liberty of the children of God!

Happy those who understand the spirit of self-denial! For them obedience becomes easy and subjection to Rule and Superiors sweet and light!

What service could be compared with the service of Jesus? He is the best of masters, whether we consider His own infinite perfection or His infinite goodness toward us. Countless martyrs preferred to suffer the most cruel death rather than forfeit the happiness of contemplating His beauty, "ever ancient and ever new," which will eternally enrapture the angels and saints. Furthermore, Jesus commands nothing difficult. It is true that He Himself calls His service a yoke and a burden, but He assures us that the yoke is easy and the burden light. In what does the service of Jesus consist? Chiefly in loving Him and in loving our neighbor for His sake. What is easier to love than infinite Beauty and Goodness and for His sake to love creatures made in His image? There is no yoke sweeter nor any burden lighter than the yoke and burden of love. "As soon as we love," says St. Augustine, "there is no more pain, or we love pain, if pain there be." And St. Teresa of Ávila exclaimed, "Your thorns, O my God, are roses!"

"O my God, my Love . . . enlarge me in love, that I may learn to taste with the interior mouth of the heart how sweet it is to love. . . . Let me be possessed by love, mounting above myself through excess of love. Let me sing the canticle of love, let me follow You, my Beloved, let my soul quite lose herself in Your praises, jubilant in Your love. Let me love You more than myself, and myself only for You, and all others in You . . . as the law of love commands, which shines forth from You" (*Imitation of Christ*).



*A Penitent Woman*



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“Now one of the Pharisees asked him to dine with him. . . . And behold, a woman in the town who was a sinner, upon learning that he was at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment; and standing behind him at his feet, she began to bathe his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment” (Lk. 7:36–38).

One of the Pharisees of Capharnaum or a neighboring village, less hostile to our Savior than other members of his sect, invited Him to dine at his house. What his motives were it is difficult to say, in view of the reserve and coldness with which Jesus was received by him.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of advancing continually in Your love.

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During the repast at the Pharisee’s house, a woman suddenly entered the banquet hall. Judging by the alabaster vase of ointment which she carried, she was a woman of wealth. In any case, she was a person of noble character, possessing as much decisiveness and energy for good as for evil. Full of faith in Jesus and without regard for the many witnesses of her open acknowledgment of guilt, she cast herself at His feet and began to bathe them with her tears and wipe them with her hair, which she had unbound. This was a further and notable gesture of humility, for Jewish women considered it a disgrace to appear in public with their hair in disorder. Yet, more striking and precious in

this conversion than either faith or humility was love, as our Savior Himself was pleased to remark.

The guests were disconcerted by this incident and the Pharisee host was scandalized. Further, he was now convinced that our Savior was not a prophet but an ordinary man; otherwise He would have been able to recognize this woman as a sinner. The Pharisee did not see her humility, contrition, and love, but only that she was a sinner. Secure in the consciousness of his own virtue, this Pharisee viewed the scene with scorn, both for our Savior and for the woman at His feet. Jesus knew his thoughts and the hard lesson he deserved was immediately forthcoming. With dignity and severity, yet gently, our Savior obliged the Pharisee to condemn himself by answering a simple question based on a parable of transparently clear application. This poor woman, the parable teaches, is surely very guilty; as for the Pharisee, his debt is less great. But the sinner has just given our Savior proof of a sincere and active love, while the Pharisee had treated Him with scant respect. Because of the greatness of her love, the sins of this woman had been forgiven, and spiritually she is now far superior to the Pharisee, whose guilt is less, but who lacks faith and love. Thus, in a most striking manner, Jesus justified this sinful woman. In moving and beautiful words He spoke of her love and its role in her justification; and not only once, but twice, He assured her that her sins were forgiven.

In this incident we may observe the progress of Christian justification. Faith is its preparation — faith that is not merely intellectual assent to truths about God, but a turning of the whole man: mind, will and affections, toward Him. Then, love, contrition, and confession on the part of the soul, and mercy on the part of God, complete the work of justification.

But love is a preliminary condition for pardon, and pardon is itself the starting point of a new and greater love. A sinful past life, repented and atoned for, could never be an obstacle, therefore, to intimate union with God.

O Jesus, You give me both consolation and warning in this incident. A sinful life atoned for by generous and fervent repentance, is more agreeable to You than a sinless life which is passed in self-complacency and spiritual indolence. Help me, O Jesus, never to yield to feelings of complacency, or allow myself to rest in a false security.

JULY 31

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### *The True Kinsmen of Christ*



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“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:50).

Represent to yourself the Mother of our Savior and His kinsmen outside the house in Capharnaum where Jesus was teaching; they were probably prevented from reaching Him by the large crowds which had gathered to listen to a dispute between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees.

Divine Master, grant me the grace of transforming my human views and feelings into Your supernatural ones.

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If we are to identify as the relatives of Jesus those who, as St. Mark tells us, came *to lay hold of him, for they said* (meaning probably, “they heard people saying”), “*He has gone mad,*” then the words of St. John, *not even his brethren believed in him,* may be applied to them. Despite so many

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miracles, their earlier connections with Jesus and the obscurity in which it had pleased Him to veil His divinity were still sources of scandal to His brethren. Faith is indeed a gift! But perhaps their step was prompted by the desire to hide our Savior and themselves with Him from the hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees, who seem never to have let Jesus out of their sight; for St. Mark tells us that on this occasion the Scribes had come down from Jerusalem. It is possible that the Pharisees had even threatened our Savior's relatives, if they made no attempt to dissuade Him from continuing His apostolate. In any case their views and sentiments, however kindly meant, were inspired by worldly considerations and were most unenlightened. Mary had perhaps been prevailed upon to accompany them without understanding their true purpose. Or, even though she did not share their sentiments, our Lady may have come of her own accord simply to be near her Son.

Because the crowd pressed closely upon our Savior, His relatives could not approach Him personally. Therefore, *standing outside, they sent to him, calling him*. Those who brought the message to Jesus probably thought that He would be overjoyed at the news. But He appears to have paid no attention to the first summons. It would seem that He continued His discourse and that the crowd around about Him reminded Him that His Mother and brethren were waiting. The response of Jesus was given in a manner infinitely sublime, moving, and significant. "*Who is my mother and who are my brethren?*" He said. Then, turning His gaze toward His disciples He set the example of complete detachment in the interests of the Father which He had enjoined on His followers. "*Behold my mother and my brethren!*" He continued, "*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven,*

*he is my brother and sister and mother.*" In this answer Jesus did not disclaim the ties of kinship, but He solemnly affirmed by His words that His first duty was to the bond which united Him with the Father. Moreover, He defined as His relatives those who were united to the Father by the accomplishment of His will, which is to hear His word and put it into practice.

It is almost the same answer that He gave to Mary and Joseph when they found Him in the Temple; or as the reply He will later give to the woman in the crowd who proclaimed Mary blessed because of the natural bond that united her to her Son. Jesus wished to teach us that without the spiritual kinship that is achieved by faith and a holy life, the natural bond is of no consequence for salvation. How did Mary receive the answer of her Son? Certainly she was not at all taken aback by it. She understood perfectly the meaning of His response, for by reason of her perfect accomplishment of the will of God she was surely His nearest relative also in a spiritual sense. She rejoiced in her heart that we had been given a means of contracting with Jesus a relationship so intimate and of sharing her own honor and joy.

O Jesus, I thank You from the bottom of my heart for the great consolation of Your words in this incident. They reveal to me the deep love of Your Sacred Heart for the souls who give themselves entirely to God and faithfully do His will. Enable me to enter fully into this kinship with You and to remain in it.

*The Sower and the Seed*



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“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God” (Lk. 8:11).  
Imagine that you hear Jesus teaching His disciples the meaning  
of the parable of the seed.

Divine Master, grant me spiritual understanding of this parable  
as it applies to my soul.

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St. Gregory the Great rightly remarks that this parable of the seed needs no explanation, since Eternal Wisdom Himself has told us its meaning. The seed is the divine word. It may be received interiorly, as by an inspiration, or externally, through the sense of hearing, or through the sense of sight in reading. The sower is God and the earth is the soul. The seed falling upon the soil encounters varying degrees of receptivity. Hardness of heart is represented by the figure of the seed falling by the wayside and being eaten by the birds. The unreceptive hear the word of God without wishing to understand. The seed does not enter into their hearts. The divine seed, the grace of holiness, is received in vain by these indifferent and unreclected souls; and the devil hastens to assist its removal from their memory.

Other seed falls upon stony ground, yet it takes root and the grain begins to sprout; but soon, lacking moisture, it withers away in the heat of the sun. The stony ground is an image of those who receive the word of God with interest and even with joy. They immediately conceive good desires from which certain good works begin to appear; but a want of moral earnestness and the unwillingness to make sacrifices

soon obliterate the first impressions, as the sun in one day withers a plant which has no roots. Again, some of the seed falls among thorns which, springing up with the grain, choke its growth. This part of the parable represents the souls who are attached to earthly things, full of ill-regulated affections, encumbered with human preoccupations. One cannot serve two masters; the thorns choke the good grain. Passions are at work in every human heart, but with divine grace we can render them harmless. The last portion of the seed falls on good ground and produces a harvest. Here we recognize those who offer to the word of God the good earth of a good will. But, since the co-operation of the human will may vary in degree, the word of God yields in these souls a varying harvest: "one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundredfold."

The rewards of the spiritual life, both in this world and in heaven, are no more easily won than the prizes of earth. After the seed of the word of God has been received into the upright heart, the harvest depends upon persevering effort, patience, and faithful co-operation with the graces that ever accompany the divine word. But since the recompense is so high and so excellent, we should expect its attainment to cost us more than anything which is below it in value.

*I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my word. Show your wondrous kindness, O savior of those who flee from their foes to refuge at your right hand. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who use violence against me (Ps. 16:6-9).*

*The Word of God and the Eucharist*



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“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Lk. 8:8.)

The seed of the word of God develops gradually even in the best soil. The measure of its productiveness is determined by the grace of God that accompanies it, together with the recipient’s dispositions of mind and heart.

O Jesus, grant that I may hear Your word with an understanding mind and an efficacious will.

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“Tell me,” asks St. Caesarius of Arles, “which seems to you to have the higher dignity: the word or the Body of Jesus Christ? If you answer rightly, you will say that the word of Jesus Christ is no less worthy of honor than His Body. We should be as careful not to allow His word to fall from our hearts as we are to keep the Body of Jesus from falling to the ground when we receive Him.” The word of God and the Eucharist are both intended to reach our hearts, although by different means. They who, in approaching the altar, open only their bodily mouth and close to Jesus the mouth of their heart, eat and drink judgment to themselves, as St. Paul says. In the same way, one who hears the word of God with his bodily ears and allows the ear of his soul to remain shut also merits condemnation. To hear interiorly is to listen to the secret voice that speaks within us, as well as to what is heard or read by the aid of our bodily senses. This spiritual and interior discourse forms the true instruction, for without it, the words of men are useless. God alone is able to teach us truth; angels or men can merely point it



out to us. God alone is *the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.*

On the altar the word of the priest changes the gifts that are presented there into the Body of Christ, and so the word of God should transform us interiorly, that we may become living members of His Mystical Body. If Jesus Christ had not manifested Himself to men in these two forms; by the reality of His flesh and of His word, He would not be revealed to the whole world, although He wills to be the Savior of all. In the reality of His flesh He showed Himself in only one corner of the earth, in ancient Palestine; but through the reality of His word, as by the Eucharist, He is present everywhere in the world. And it is only by His word that He reveals Himself to our senses, as we await the happy day when we shall see Him in His glory.

But the grace of hearing the word of Jesus with reverent attention will not avail us unless we obey Him. We must prove by our conduct that the Savior is nourishing us with His words, just as our actions after receiving Holy Communion should make it evident that we have been fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. Fruitless desires or even lively but passing emotions are not enough. We shall prove that we have been interiorly taught by God only through our works, for our good Master alone can give us at once the knowledge of that which we should do and the grace to accomplish it. O good Jesus, You have said, "*He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.*" Help me by Your grace to be not only faithful and attentive in listening to Your words, but resolute in obeying; so that by my works I may be known as a worthy disciple in Your school.

*The Wheat and the Weeds*



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“Another parable he set before them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away” (Mt. 13:24, 25).

This parable is a prophecy of the future of the Church; in the vast field of the Church militant, good grain and weeds are permitted by God to grow together until the harvesting at the last judgment.

Divine Savior, grant me resignation in suffering the evils of this life.

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The weeds in our Savior’s parable represent the wicked, who in this world are mingled with the good and may even pass for the good, like the weed *zizanium*. This weed, a species of wild wheat common in Palestine, cannot be distinguished from the wheat until the ears of grain ripen. When God made the world, He *saw that it was good*, yet we see evil abounding in the world. In the Church He founded our Savior sowed the grain of truth, virtue, and the counsels of perfection, but even in the Church wickedness appeared; nor did it delay in manifesting itself, for crime and betrayal appeared among the Apostles themselves. Since God and our Savior sowed only good seed, whence came the weeds? The history of the world would be unintelligible if the work of the devil were not recognized. Where the Son of Man had sowed His seed openly and at the cost of hard toil, Satan sowed weeds hastily and during the night. And

once the weeds of evil are sowed, they often grow more luxuriantly and rapidly than the pure wheat of virtue. Moreover, we ourselves contribute to the disorder initiated by the devil whenever we commit sin.

The servants of the householder in the parable were surprised by the appearance of the weeds and wished to uproot them immediately. In this desire, however, they showed an unwise zeal, for to remove the undesirable growths could do more harm than good. Impatience with the presence of the wicked often arises from narrowness of outlook which regards only immediate advantages or personal interests. God views the matter otherwise. He does not look upon the weeds with complacency. He abominates them, but He does not straightway eradicate them; that is, He does not remove all the wicked, at one stroke, from the Church. The reasons for this are that God respects the liberty with which man has been endowed by Him and that, as long as life lasts, there is the possibility that the wicked will respond to grace and be converted. God spares the weeds, also, for the sake of the good grain. Association with the wicked makes it necessary for the good to keep a strict watch over themselves, and offers them opportunities of growing in patience, humility, and confidence in divine Providence.

The preservation and development of the good seed is the all-important matter in the divine economy and, in some mysterious way, the presence of the wicked contributes to this end. Finally, however, all wicked schemes will be seen to have only furthered God's designs; for the time will come when He will intervene. On the last day there will be a separation for all to see of the elect and the reprobate. At that great gleaning the angels will gather the wheat, figure of the elect, into the celestial granary; but the weeds, that is,

the damned, will be cast into the *furnace of fire*. This general sifting of mankind on the last day will be only a public ratification of the sentence pronounced at death upon each individual soul. As death finds us so we shall remain for all eternity. "Death changes nothing; it only immortalizes."

"In Thine infinite goodness we beseech Thee, O Lord, to watch over Thy household that even as it relies solely upon the hope of Thy heavenly grace, so it may ever be defended by Thy protection" (Roman Missal).

AUGUST 4

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*"Wilt Thou Have Us . . . Gather Them Up?"*



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"Wilt thou have us go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:29)

Imagine that you hear Jesus teaching His disciples and us the meaning of the parable of the good seed and the weeds.

Divine Savior, make known to me by Your grace that root fault in me which is the source of my sins.

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As in the Church, so in our own souls the weeds grow up with the good grain. The paradise of innocence lasted only a short time, for evil very soon invades the soul of man. By vigilance we can prevent the wicked sower from carrying out his plans, but we sometimes invite his entrance into our souls by our own carelessness. It may be a book, a companion, a bad habit; then, suddenly, we awaken to find that the harm has been done, that something new and not good has come into existence within us.

When the servants in our Savior's parable asked the house-

holder's permission to pull up the weeds from among the wheat, he bade them wait until the time of harvest. Does this mean that we should allow the faults that have taken root in us to remain undisturbed? Assuredly not; but we are here instructed to be patient, to follow the advice of our spiritual director, and to exercise prudence, in order not to destroy the good with the bad, the virtue together with the vice. Yet, that our salvation ultimately depends upon removing the weeds of our vices is clear from the terrifying words of the householder, that is, the Son of Man: "*At harvest time I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn.*" But in order that we may not uproot the good grain of virtue in our efforts to eradicate our faults, it is necessary for us to discover the predominant or root fault that germinates deep within our souls and chokes the growth of the divine life within us. No one can give us this knowledge except God who searches the hearts of men. Let us ask Him for His enlightening grace that we may be enabled to look into the depths of our souls and set about laying the ax to the root.

Our self-examination should begin with the threefold concupiscence inherent in our nature: pride, sensuality, and ambition; from one or other of these especially proceed all our sins and imperfections. Pride gives rise to doubts against faith, disobedience, indocility, desires for revenge, envy, jealousy, discourtesy, complaints, insolence, anger, vanity, affectation, moodiness, sensitiveness, hypocrisy, and lying. Sensuality causes inconstancy, timidity, laziness, and inordinate desires of seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling. Ambition leads to desires of possessing, especially places of preference and dignities. These passions are the weeds that grow among the pure wheat of grace. If we allow ourselves to sleep in relaxation

and tepidity, the shoots springing from these harmful seeds will soon be absorbing the nourishment that should be strengthening the good grain.

O my God, help me to be a vigilant guardian of my soul. Enable me to recognize evil in myself as soon as it appears, and to hate it as You do. With Your grace to enlighten me and give me courage, I shall be able to discover the principal source of my sins and imperfections and destroy its life in my soul.

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AUGUST 5

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*Dedication of St. Mary of the Snow*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 833)

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AUGUST 6\*

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*The Mustard Seed*



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“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. . . . The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened” (Mt. 13:31, 33).

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven prophesy the coming and the spread of the kingdom of God, on earth; they

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\* If a meditation for the feast of the Transfiguration is preferred, see September 2, p. 601.

represent also the progress of grace in the faithful soul.  
Divine Savior, help me to die to myself that Your divine life  
may fructify within me.

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The parable of the mustard seed shows us in figure the gradual expansion and the unexpected progress of the Gospel. Mustard seeds, *the smallest of all the seeds*, are without color or odor, but they have great pungency when ground or eaten; and after they have germinated in the earth, they grow in the East into a tree several feet high, whose wide, spreading branches are very inviting to the smaller birds. What was the Church in her beginnings to human eyes but a band of Galilean fishermen grouped about a village carpenter? Yet the Church of Jesus Christ was to become a vast society in which men of all nations would find shelter, nourishment, and peace for their souls. This visible manifestation of the power of the Gospel was, however, only the exterior effect of an internal force that was illustrated by our Savior in the parable of the leaven, working with unseen but potent influence in a mass of flour or meal. The leaven, by a silent, uninterrupted development, transforms the whole mass in which it has been hidden.

In the same way the principle of spiritual transformation placed in the Church by Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit, the word of faith, grace, the sacraments, was to penetrate and transform the whole mass of mankind. A newness and holiness of thought and desire, and of their manner of living and acting were to make them into men worthy of their high spiritual destiny. In both parables the feature that is emphasized is the development of greatness and power out of weak and insignificant beginnings. As the tiny mustard seed contains in itself such force that it can expand into a

tree, so a morsel of leaven, by an internal transforming action, penetrates in a short time three measures of flour.

The parables also apply, and equally well, to progress in the spiritual life. The work of our salvation and perfection is founded upon humility and self-contempt. "Do you wish to be great? Begin by making yourself little," advises St. Augustine. Every work for God must rest on the firm foundation of humility, and every disciple must study industriously in the school of his humble Master. "Jesus Christ was the mustard seed in His incarnation," says St. John Chrysostom, "and being bruised by His passion, communicates His virtues to all our spiritual actions." Real conversion, like all true life, comes from within; but it will manifest itself externally. Through interior fervor the souls of the just make such progress in the life of faith and the love of God that they go *from strength to strength*, the outward manifestation being the result of the inward reality. This development is not sudden or abrupt, but, like the leaven, a peaceful and continuous progress. Faith and grace act upon the understanding, the understanding acts upon the will, and the action of the will extends to thoughts, words, actions, the whole activity of life, the entire person, until the disciple of Christ can say with St. Paul, "*I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.*"

"We beseech Thee, O almighty God, that whereas our sins have angered Thee against us, our prayers and praise which Thou dost inspire may propitiate and please Thee. Thus, by Thy mercy, the vexations of the world will not cast down our soul nor hurtful delusion possess her; nor the darkness of unbelief surround her, but we shall shine with the light of Thy countenance, wherewith Thou hast signed us, and ever, by firmness in the true faith, walk in the brightness of the same" (Mozarabic Breviary).



## *The Storm on the Lake*



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“Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there came a great calm” (Mt. 8:26).

It seems that late one evening our Savior directed the Apostles to set sail with Him for Decapolis, on the eastern shore of Lake Genesareth. During the voyage a great storm arose on the lake.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of quietness of heart that relies upon Your aid and waits for it patiently.

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The storm which overtook our Savior and the Apostles as they were crossing Lake Genesareth on this occasion was an extremely violent one. St. Matthew tells us that *the boat was covered by the waves*, and St. Mark adds that *the waves were beating into the boat, so that the boat was now filling*. Yet, during this time of real danger that their vessel would either sink or be dashed to pieces, our Savior remained in deep slumber in the stern of the boat where He had lain down to rest before the storm arose. This sleep of Jesus, although the result of fatigue, was nonetheless voluntary and mysterious. Since it was to be a brief slumber, He had not gone down to the sleeping quarters; hence His disciples were able to arouse Him more easily. Furthermore, despite the drowsiness of His senses, the soul of Jesus retained the full use of His infused knowledge and He continued to watch over His little band of followers.

The Apostles, naturally, did everything in their power to keep their bark afloat; but as the danger became more acute,

they lost courage and called out to Jesus in alarm, "*Lord, save us! We are perishing!*" The imperfection of their conduct was not in the fact that they were frightened nor that they thought they could not survive the storm by natural means, but in that they had persuaded themselves their Master needed to be awakened in order to help them. They were wanting in faith, as Jesus later pointed out to them. Moreover, in their words as recorded by St. Mark, "*Master, does it not concern thee that we are perishing?*" there is a hint of reproach and ill humor. Our Savior, for His part, upon being awakened by the Apostles, rebuked them, not for their fear, which was involuntary and reasonable, but for their lack of faith. "*Why are you fearful,*" He said to them, "*O you of little faith?*" Then, looking out at the raging storm and the swelling waves, our Savior said, "*Peace, be still!*" *And the wind fell and there came a great calm.*

It was not only for their own instruction that the Apostles were exposed to this danger, but also to reassure all who in the course of the centuries were to behold the tempests of persecution rising against the Church, or who would themselves be assailed by interior and exterior trials. For those who suffer with Christ and place their confidence in Him, all trials will end, like the tempest on the sea of Galilee, in *a great calm*. Why, then, should we be anxious over the outcome of trials which come to us or to those we love?

*O Lord, God of hosts, who is like you? Mighty are you, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging of the sea; you still the swelling of its waves. You have crushed Rahab with a mortal blow; with your strong arm you have scattered your enemies. Yours are the heavens, and yours is the earth; the world and its fullness you have founded; north and south you created; Thabor and Hermon rejoice at your*

*name. Yours is a mighty arm; strong is your hand, exalted your right hand. Justice and judgment are the foundation of your throne; kindness and truth go before you (Ps. 88:9-15).*

AUGUST 8

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## *Peace in the Storms of This Life*



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“And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea” (Mt. 8:23). Represent to yourself Jesus asleep and the Apostles endeavoring to control their boat which was being covered by the waves. Divine Master, grant me the grace of an abiding interior peace.

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The Apostles, who were attacked by a storm even while Jesus was with them, represent all who are tried by temptation in crossing the sea of life, even though they are in the service of the Master, and are supported by His presence in their souls and in the Eucharist. Like the Church, which is represented by Peter's boat, each of us will encounter persecutions, and this for the same reason that the Church is assailed by them; namely, that the Christian life, and especially the life of a good religious, is in opposition to the world. It arouses the hatred of the world and of those who live according to its spirit. As long as our life lasts, we may never think of ourselves as already safe in the harbor. We must expect to see the storms rise, not only all about us, but even from within our own selves; for the highest sanctity does not destroy our passions, it only regulates them.

Nor is the devil prevented from tempting us because of our growth in holiness. On the contrary, the holier we are,

the more vehement these attacks may become. Then it is that we must furl our sails, like alert and courageous mariners, that is to say, recollect ourselves interiorly, until the waves of temptation subside. In this way we shall close the entrance to the interior of our souls and prevent the waves from submerging our vessel, however violently they may wash over its surface; and in due time divine grace will bring the calm. In the center of the soul that loves God there is always a peace which external attacks can neither trouble nor surprise, for nothing exterior can touch our inward peace unless we so will.

Our individual victory is also to be won under the same conditions as it is won by the Church. First, the Savior must be with us, that is, we must be living in His grace and in obedience to His will. Then, we must do everything in our power to surmount the storm. Finally, our confidence must be firmly fixed in the Lord. Under these conditions, no storm, however violent, can harm us. As for the sleep of Jesus, we often provoke it ourselves by our negligence and distractedness. Or it may happen that divine Providence, wishing to test us, will seemingly abandon us for a time to aridity and languor of spirit. But whatever the cause of Jesus' slumber, we should hasten to Him in prayer, never losing our trust in Him who continues to watch over us even when He seems to be asleep.

Good Jesus, even though the prayer of Your Apostles was not what it should have been, You came to their assistance; for You know the weakness of our nature and You are infinitely good. In Your mercy and power help me to survive in safety the winds of temptation and the waves of my passions.

*The Exorcism in Gerasa*



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“And they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes; and as soon as he stepped out of the boat there met him from the tombs a man with an unclean spirit” (Mk. 5:1, 2).

Picture our Savior disembarking into a sort of ravine or defile formed by crags where caves had been hollowed out to serve as tombs.

Lord Jesus, keep me always conscious of my supreme need of You for resisting the power and malice of Satan.

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This is the first time in His public ministry that our Savior entered pagan territory and, therefore, in a more particular sense, into the realm of Satan, the prince of this world. St. Matthew speaks of two possessed men, but St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one, perhaps because one was more violent and notorious, and perhaps also, because only one of the demoniacs afterward expressed the desire to follow Jesus. *This man lived in the tombs*, St. Mark tells us, *and no one could any longer bind him, even with chains; for often he had been bound with fetters and chains, and he had rent the chains asunder and broken the fetters into pieces. And no one was able to control him. And constantly, night and day, he was in the tombs and on the mountains, howling and gashing himself with stones.* This demoniac ran to cast himself at the feet of Jesus, *crying out with a loud voice, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, the Son of the most high God?”* The impotence of the demons before the power

of God is shown by the fact that far from preventing Jesus from passing that way, as St. Matthew tells us they did to others, they ran to Him and threw themselves at His feet, beseeching Him not to torment them, for He was saying, *"Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit."* From this we can gather how anxious the devils are to roam the world like wild beasts "seeking whom they may devour."

Then Jesus asked the possessed man, *"What is thy name?"* And he said to him, *"My name is Legion, for we are many."* And he entreated him earnestly not to drive them out of the country. Our Savior allowed these evil spirits to enter as they requested into a herd of swine that were feeding on the mountainside. Instantly the swine, numbering two thousand, threw themselves into the sea and were drowned. The malice as well as the power of the demons when they are permitted to act is made evident here. They are *evil* spirits; that is, they can do only harm. Since it was impossible for them to injure their human victim, they doubtless hoped that by destroying these animals they would turn the people of Gerasa against our Savior and so prevent Him from staying in that region.

Why did Jesus grant their request? In the first place, there is no question of injustice to the owner of the herd. Although He rarely made use of His power in this respect, the God-Man was sole Master of His creation; moreover, we are shown here that the salvation of one man is infinitely more important than the lives of thousands of animals. Perhaps also, our Savior wished to prove the reality of diabolical possession by His act and to make us realize by means of a concrete illustration that the malice of the devil is something to be feared and prayed against. It would seem, too, that the Gerasenes were in need of a salutary lesson

whereby they would be drawn away from an excessive pre-occupation with temporal goods and recalled to a concern for the spiritual and the supernatural.

O my Savior, I adore Your majesty and power as it is revealed in this mystery. Even the evil spirits recognize You as their Lord. And not merely one demon but thousands were mastered and dispersed at Your word. Hell itself is powerless to defend its empire, and in paying You the homage of flattery the devils bore witness to Your sovereign power. Shall my attachment to self and to creatures continue to resist the loving invitations to closer union from One whom even the fallen angels reverence and obey?

AUGUST 10

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### *The Reaction of the Gerasenes*



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“But the swineherds fled and reported it in the town and in the country; and people came out to see what had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the man who had been afflicted by the devil, sitting clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. . . . And they began to entreat him to depart from their district” (Mk. 5:14-17).

See the cured demoniac sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus.

Divine Savior, enlighten me that I may choose always Your way of supernatural virtue rather than the natural way of self-satisfaction.

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The panic-stricken custodians of the swine had hastened to spread the news of what had occurred. And now the Gerasenes gathered in throngs to view with their own eyes the wonders of which they had heard from the swineherds.

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Yet, convinced as they were by the evidence of their senses that a real miracle had been worked, they neither acknowledged their belief and welcomed the Savior, nor did they, on the other hand, openly declare themselves against Him. Their reaction was one of fear and, dreading a still greater temporal misfortune, they begged Jesus to leave their district. The fear which prompted them was neither filial nor servile, but the spirit of the world, which knows only how to appreciate temporal goods and which is made uneasy by the presence of the supernatural.

Upon their arrival at the scene the Gerasenes found the cured demoniac clothed and self-possessed at our Savior's feet, the Good Shepherd with the lost sheep whom He had brought back to the fold in His arms. And just as Jesus was about to step into the boat and take His departure, *the man who had been afflicted by the devil*, continues St. Mark, *began to entreat him that he might remain with him. And he did not allow him, but said to him, "Go home to thy relatives, and tell them all that the Lord has done for thee, and how he has had mercy on thee."* Jesus did not grant the cured demoniac's request that he might be permitted to follow Him, probably because there was question here of a Gentile, and the Messiah *was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Furthermore, the Jews would have despised him, and his presence among the disciples of Jesus would have been regarded as a crime. But this man was charged by our Savior with the apostolate in the Decapolis. He was to publish everywhere the great wonders that God had wrought in his favor. This mission he faithfully carried out, as we read in St. Mark: *And he departed, and began to publish in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And all marveled.*



The first entrance of our Lord into Gentile territory since the flight into Egypt is full of instruction for us. Merely by His presence on this soil He revealed Himself as the Heir and Redeemer of all peoples, Gentile as well as Jew; this visit is the first blow struck at paganism. It is true that our Savior left the land of the Gerasenes, but He did not abandon it. From among these pagans He chose an apostle, and later He Himself returned to the region of the Decapolis; for it was here apparently that the cure of the deaf-mute occurred, which St. Mark records in the seventh chapter of his Gospel. O good Jesus, never let me decline the visits of Your grace to my poor soul. Perhaps I too, like the Gerasenes, have been afraid of the sanctity which You require of me in the religious state, because of the sacrifice such holiness demands. Let me not prefer my selfish satisfactions to You, as the Gerasenes preferred their herds of swine; but enable me to show my gratitude for Your numberless favors by my alacrity in corresponding with Your merciful designs for me and in working zealously for the salvation of souls.

AUGUST 11

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*The Woman Suffering From Hemorrhage*



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“Take courage, daughter; thy faith has saved thee” (Mt. 9:22). As our Savior was following Jairus, who had earnestly begged Him to come and lay His hands upon his little daughter, who was dying, He was surrounded by the swarming, pushing crowd. This circumstance permitted a woman afflicted for twelve years with a flow of blood to carry out her plan of

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touching His garment, in the hope that she might obtain a cure without attracting attention to herself.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace of deep interior and exterior reverence whenever I am in Your sacramental presence.

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This woman's malady rendered her unclean in the eyes of the Law. Had the people about her suspected her condition she would have been driven away and bitterly reproached for exposing her fellow Israelites to defilement. She might not, therefore, ask openly for a cure; and so she had formed the plan of approaching Jesus secretly by hiding herself in the crowd and watching for an opportunity of touching only His garment; for she said to herself, "*If I touch but his cloak I shall be saved.*" Her strong faith and courage did the rest; as soon as she touched the tassel of His cloak she was restored to health. Our omniscient Lord knew of this woman and of her furtive approach and He was aware also of her excellent dispositions, which He had just rewarded with a cure. Nevertheless, He asked, "*Who touched me?*" Peter and the others were much puzzled by this question and they replied, "*Master, the crowds throng and press upon thee, and dost thou say, 'Who touched me?'*" But the Master insisted, "*Someone touched me; for I perceived that power had gone forth from me.*" Humanly speaking, our Savior had not seen the woman and, in accordance with the limitations of our human nature, which He had voluntarily assumed in the Incarnation, He followed the rule whereby all human beings acquire knowledge through the senses and the intelligence. The woman, seeing that she had been discovered, cast herself trembling at the feet of Jesus and confessed before all the reasons that had prompted her act and occasioned also her instantaneous cure.

In this miracle for the first time Jesus had recourse to an external object in performing a cure. He was to repeat this procedure on another occasion which is recorded by St. Matthew, namely, when the people of Genesar brought their sick to Him and all who touched the tassel of His cloak were cured. Yet, wishing this woman to understand that it was not her stealthy touch of the tassel of His cloak that had won her cure, but her faith, Jesus said to her, as St. Luke tells us, "*Daughter, thy faith has saved thee; go in peace.*" Moreover, by eliciting her acknowledgment of her cure and so revealing the miracle to the crowd, our Savior wished to enliven the faith of Jairus, which was not as strong as that of the woman who had just been cured. Jairus thought it was necessary for Jesus to come to the bedside of his daughter and lay His hands upon her. Again, by asking who had touched Him and by affirming that He felt the life-giving power go forth from Him, Jesus proved that He was clearly aware of the accomplishment of the miracle, and that it had come to pass as an effect of His power. This event constitutes, in fact, a new and glorious revelation of the divinity of the Savior.

How can it be, O my Jesus, that after so many contacts with Your adorable Body and Blood in the Eucharist, my spiritual infirmities are still so numerous and so deep-seated! In Your love and mercy, give me today when I come to Your holy table dispositions of soul like those of this woman whom You cured as a reward of her faith and confidence in You. Grant me also when I am in Your presence, when I am about to receive Your sacraments, a holy awe and reverence like that which prompted this afflicted woman to venture to touch only the tassel of Your cloak.

*The Daughter of Jairus*



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“But he, taking her by the hand, cried out, saying, ‘Girl, arise!’ ”  
(Lk. 8:54)

Scarcely had the procession started on its way again after the cure of the woman afflicted with the flow of blood when word was brought that Jairus’ daughter had died.

Divine Savior, *give light to my eyes that I may not sleep in death.*

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Jairus had made no complaint upon seeing Jesus tarry so long by the roadside. In his charity he could not begrudge that poor suffering woman her cure. Indeed, his own faith had been greatly strengthened by the miracle; but now his hopes were suddenly dashed by the sad news of his daughter’s death. Jesus, aware of his deep distress, said to him with the greatest kindness, “*Do not be afraid; only have faith and she shall be saved.*” From the circumstances surrounding this episode, it would seem that our Savior was determined, so to speak, to work this miracle in spite of several adverse factors. In the first place, the faith of Jairus apparently needed to be strengthened by the cure wrought on the way to his house; perhaps desperation alone had brought him to Jesus. Furthermore, the messenger from his household who said, “*Thy daughter is dead; do not trouble him,*” probably expressed the conviction also of those who had sent him, namely, that while the Master had power to restore health to the sick, once death had occurred, there must be an end of the matter.

The family of Jairus, moreover, showed themselves very unsympathetically disposed toward our Savior, for they only mocked at His consoling words, "*Do not weep; she is asleep, not dead.*" But Jesus, on His part, showed the most delicate consideration for Jairus in not permitting the crowd to enter the house and in taking with Him of the Apostles only Peter, James, and John. On the other hand, He so disposed the circumstances that the authenticity of the miracle could not be denied. The three chief Apostles and the parents of the child were witnesses of it; and, by declaring upon entering the house that the girl was not dead but sleeping, our Savior evoked the protest and contradiction of the members of the household, proving beyond doubt that the girl was really dead. More than once, Jesus used the word "sleep" to signify death, especially when referring to those whom He willed to restore to life.

But although life was really extinct in the child, He awoke her as easily as one arouses a person who is sleeping. Going to the bed and taking the cold little hand, He said to the dead child in the Aramaic dialect which He ordinarily spoke, "*Talitha cumi,*" which is interpreted, "*Girl, I say to thee, arise.*" Instantly she arose and began to walk; then, to show that she had been restored not only to life but to health, our Savior directed that she be given something to eat. According to his custom, Jesus forbade the parents to publicize the miracle. Besides His habitual prudence in forestalling any demonstration of enthusiasm which might be turned to political ends, Jesus may here have had the additional motive of protecting this family from the hostility of the Pharisees. This hostility would have been all the more lively inasmuch as Jairus was head of the synagogue.

O divine Master, stretch forth Your all-powerful hand to touch

my soul, and awaken me to the fulness of life and health in unflagging fervor of spirit. Only in the strength of *your arm and your right hand and the light of your countenance* shall I be able to rise from my sins and my follies and walk in the way of perfection.

AUGUST 13

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### *The Two Blind Men*



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“Now as Jesus was passing on from there, two blind men followed him, crying out and saying, ‘Have pity on us, Son of David!’”  
(Mt. 9:27)

As Jesus was leaving the house of Jairus whose daughter He had just restored to life, two blind men followed Him, imploring Him with great faith to cure them.

Good Jesus, grant me the grace of final perseverance.

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The faith and confidence of these blind men of Capharnaum were revealed in their actions and in their words. They followed Jesus, crying out, “*Have pity on us, Son of David!*” Such words from an Israelite amounted to an acknowledgment that Jesus was the Messiah. With the exception of the Apostles, no other Jews had as yet so openly declared their faith. After the raising of the son of the widow of Naim from the dead, the people, seized with astonishment and fear, had said, “*A great prophet has arisen among us.*” Further than this they had not gone. But now these two *blind* men professed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, simply, courageously, and without concern for the offense this title would certainly give the Pharisees and Scribes who on this

occasion as always were on the scene, watching and listening.

At first, our Savior seemed not to notice the suppliants. He allowed them to follow after Him imploring His mercy, without even turning in their direction. But they continued to follow and cry out to Him, repeating their request, until He *had reached the house*. There they came into His presence and begged for a cure. Still it was not enough. Our Savior asked them if they really believed that He could work the miracle they were asking of Him. Without hesitation and with deep reverence they answered, "Yes, Lord." Our Savior's apparent indifference to their pleading before the arrival at the house and to their profession of faith in Him as the Messiah again shows His great prudence and reserve. He did not wish to arouse His enemies before the time, by openly accepting the glorious Messianic title, *Son of David*. Also, Jesus wished to prolong the test, so that these blind men might be the better-prepared to receive the grace of a cure by the exercise of patience, resignation, humility, and perseverance.

When their faith had been sufficiently tested, our Savior touched their eyes, and they recovered their sight. Again, it was probably out of discretion that He forbade them to publicize the miracle; for He *strictly charged them, saying, "See that no one knows of this!"* It is difficult to see how anything so striking as the sudden cure of these blind men could be kept secret. Their affliction was common knowledge; besides, they had been seen entering the house blind and coming out with their sight restored. It may be that our Savior's injunction referred more particularly to their use of the Messianic title in making their plea. At all events, the blind men, in a surge of generous gratitude, forgot the prohibition and proclaimed their cure everywhere. In this occurrence we

find manifested again the habitual characteristics of the Savior: prudence, wisdom, goodness, and power; and from the blind men we learn that faith, confidence, and perseverance are always victorious. Let us ask our Savior that these qualities may be ours throughout our lives and that with their aid the blindness that now permits us to see Him only as *through a mirror in an obscure manner* may be one day healed in the everlasting Vision face to face.

“Jesus, whom I look at shrouded here below,  
I beseech Thee send me what I thirst for so,  
Some day to gaze on Thee face to face in light  
And be blest for ever with Thy glory’s sight.  
Jesus, Eternal Shepherd, hear our cry:  
Increase the faith of all whose souls on Thee rely.”

AUGUST 14

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### *The Death of Our Lady*



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“You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed. You are a park that puts forth pomegranates, with all choice fruits; nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all kinds of incense” (Cant. 4:12-14).

These words from the Cantic of Canticles symbolize Mary’s mortification, her prayer, and all her great virtues, especially her divine charity. And as the Blessed Virgin lived, so she died. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, in general, say that Mary died of no other infirmity than pure love. “Either Mary ought not to die,” said St. Ildephonsus, “or die only of love.”



O Mary, obtain for me the grace of a holy death in your presence and in that of Jesus and St. Joseph.

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Death is for man a chastisement for sin, but of itself it is also the normal end of everything material. God, therefore, could permit that Mary, despite her utter sinlessness, should undergo death as well as other natural infirmities, like hunger, thirst, or weariness. Thus it had been for Christ, and thus, as the majority of Christian authors have taught, it should be also for Mary. "She bowed to the law laid down by Him to whom she gave birth," says St. John Damascene, "and as a child of the old Adam underwent the old judgment (for, indeed, her Son, too, who is the very Life, did not refuse it)." But the usual accompaniments of death were, according to the tradition, absent from Mary's last moments. For her there was no wasting of the body by sickness, no anxiety of soul, no final struggle against the powers of evil. Death came, probably, without shock or pain, from a natural diminution of her vital powers. Our Lady died with rapture in her soul and a final ardent aspiration of all her faculties toward her Son and her God. It was love for Him that had gradually consumed her life. If the soul which has come close to God only for a single instant is thereafter consumed by a torturing thirst for Him, what must have been the intensity of Mary's virginal and maternal thirst for God!

According to the legend concerning the circumstances of her death, the Apostles who were dispersed in various parts of the world were miraculously assembled at Mary's bedside, except, for some reason, St. Thomas. Their souls filled with holy sadness, they lovingly assisted at the death of the Mother of their Master, providing for her new heavenly consolations and new graces and merits by the prayers and

blessings of the Church. Then, after Mary's death, her virginal body was carried by the Apostles from Sion to Gethsemani, the scene of the Agony, which our Lady had so often revisited either in body or mind. It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of the Apostles as they laid the body of Mary in the tomb. Their dependence upon her had been a source of strength and comfort to them. But now the Church, the new fruit of Mary's maternity, had acquired the growth and vigor which it belonged to a mother to give, and the Apostles and disciples were no longer to enjoy the sweetness of her physical presence. We may imagine Peter joining his venerable hands and gazing intently for the last time at the glorious features of the Mother of the Savior — as if by his gaze of faith he would discern even beyond the shadows of death some rays of the glory wherewith Mary as Queen of Heaven was already shining. We may picture John, the adopted son, casting a last sorrowful look upon the Virgin's countenance, so calm and sweet; then the tomb was closed.

O most sweet Lady and my Mother, by the merits of your holy death, obtain for me perseverance in the divine friendship, that I may leave this life in God's grace. Assist me in that hour, my good Mother, that my death may be an act of adoration and submission, as perfect as it is possible for a creature to offer its Creator. Help me to accept fully all the conditions that God may decree for my death, with all the physical and mental suffering that He may have apportioned me. Everything that concerns my departure from this life I place in your hands, O Mary. I only beg the grace of uniting my last conscious moment with yours in an act of perfect love.

AUGUST 15

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*The Assumption of Our Lady Into Heaven*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 835)

AUGUST 16

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*The First Multiplication of the Loaves*



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“Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributed them to those reclining; and likewise the fishes, as much as they wished” (Jn. 6:11).

The first multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. It is of particular importance because it aroused greater enthusiasm among the people than any other miracle of our Savior, and because of its special relation to the Eucharist.

○ Jesus, grant that today I may receive the Bread of life with perfect interior dispositions.

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Our Savior and the Apostles had crossed Lake Tiberias in the hope of finding a deserted spot where they might rest. “Come apart into a desert place,” Jesus had said to them, “and rest a while.” But when they came ashore, they were met by the crowd who had followed them by the land route. Touched with pity, Jesus first cured their sick and then, going up a little from the shore, He sat on the slope of a

hill and spoke to the gathering until twilight on the kingdom of God. The audience had fasted since morning, but they gave no sign of weariness or impatience. The Apostles, however, observing that it was growing late, asked Jesus to send the crowd away, that they might buy food in the villages nearby. Sympathy and kindness prompted their suggestion, but the compassion of their Master was far more effective. His response to the need of these five thousand persons was to provide them Himself with the food they required. As host, He prepared the food for His guests. Moreover, His words, according to the text of St. Luke, foreshadowed the institution of the Eucharist, of which this miracle was a type and a preparation: *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the crowd.* The Apostles are here associated effectively for the first time with a miracle of our Savior.

The effect produced by this marvel was naturally extraordinary, because of the scale and duration of the prodigy. Furthermore, since it occurred when the thoughts of all were on the coming feast of the Pasch, it inevitably recalled the miraculous manna with which Moses had nourished Israel in the desert. It is not surprising, therefore, that the crowd began to surmise that Jesus Himself was the great Prophet promised the Israelites by Moses, that is to say, the Messias. And so these Galileans, naturally given as they were to enthusiasm, formed the plan of proclaiming Jesus king of Israel. The project was certainly inspired by gratitude, admiration, and by the sincere conviction that Jesus was the Messias. In this conviction the people were right, but they were deceived in thinking that the kingdom of the Messias was to be an earthly one. Their design, then, contained ele-

ments of both good and evil, faith and unbelief, gratitude and personal interest. Our Savior read their thoughts and, in order to prevent the execution of the plan, He directed the Apostles to embark again and cross to the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias. In this way He could more easily disperse the crowd; they quickly scattered, in fact, when they saw that Jesus would not prolong His stay in that place. Our Savior Himself, however, retired alone to the mountain and spent the night in prayer.

O Jesus, so often in Your public life You reveal to us the goodness of Your sacred heart, that concerns Itself with the failing wine, with the want of bread, with the coin necessary to pay the tribute, with everything, in short, that concerns our human life. In this miracle of the loaves You fed five thousand people, and twelve baskets of fragments were left over. But this number and Your munificence here are as nothing compared to the number of hungry poor to whom You dispense the Bread of life, even putting it into our mouths by the ministry of Your priests.

AUGUST 17

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### *Jesus Walks on the Water*



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“But after they had rowed some twenty-five or thirty stadia, they beheld Jesus walking upon the sea” (Jn. 6:19).

Represent to yourself the Apostles rowing against a strong wind and our Savior walking toward them upon the billowing waves of Lake Genesareth.

O Jesus, grant me an active belief and trust in Your knowledge in disposing of every event of my life.

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From evening until toward three o'clock in the morning the Apostles had not advanced more than twenty-five or thirty stadia, that is, about three miles, from the starting point. They were alone. Jesus was at prayer in the mountains, whither He had fled from the crowd who had wished to proclaim Him king after the miracle of the first multiplication of the loaves; but He was not unaware of His Apostles' toilsome and difficult plight. He saw them laboring to hold their course against the force of the wind and the waves and compassionately He came to them, walking upon the waves. The Apostles, believing that they were seeing a ghost, cried out in alarm, but Jesus reassured them with the words, "*It is I, do not be afraid.*" As soon as He entered the boat the storm subsided and *immediately the boat was at the land towards which they were going.*

Besides the immediate objective of comforting the Apostles by His presence and assisting them in their need, our Savior's intention in working this miracle was to increase their faith by a new and extraordinary proof of His divine power. The alarm of the Apostles and the demand of St. Peter, who was not entirely free from doubt when he said, "*Lord, if it is thou, bid me come to thee over the water,*" are sufficient evidence that their faith was still imperfect. They could still doubt the Savior's power, despite the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves which immediately preceded this incident. But it was necessary that they should now be possessed of strong faith in view of the new test which would soon confront them—the promise of the Holy Eucharist. In walking upon the water against the force of a strong wind and in calming the wind and the waves, Jesus appears to multiply His wonders in order to prepare the way for the acceptance of the mystery of the Eucharist, with which the

rest of this chapter of St. John is chiefly concerned. Thus, again, as in the case of the loaves, He manifested His power over nature and also His power, as it were, over His own body as a prelude to His transfiguration in the miracle of Thabor and to the glorified state of His sacred humanity after the Resurrection, as well as to His marvelous presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.

The revelation of the mystery of the Eucharist was of such great importance that our Savior took all preparatory measures to instill into His Apostles the proper dispositions for accepting it. And indeed, this miracle did elicit from the Apostles at least an incipient faith in the divinity of Jesus; for St. Matthew tells us that *they who were in the boat came and worshipped him, saying, "Truly thou art the Son of God."*

O divine Master, like the crowds that followed You in Galilee, I accept Your favors and Your wonders, but I am slow and reluctant in obeying Your laws; yet Your miracles were wrought only that men might believe in You, and obey You. And how often, dear Jesus, I do not recognize You and, like the Apostles, become alarmed when You appear to me in unexpected trials! Do not pass me by, but open my eyes to Your presence and calm the troubled waves of my passions.

AUGUST 18

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*Peter Upheld by Jesus*



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"Then Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to come to Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid; and as he began to sink he cried out, saying 'Lord, save me!' And Jesus at once stretched forth his hand and

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took hold of him, saying to him, 'O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?'" (Mt. 14:29-31)

The second portion of the mystery of our Savior's walking on the waves has a special importance for St. Peter as the future head of the Church.

Divine Savior, in all my trials let my first thought be to call upon You in faith and confidence.

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As proof that it was really He who was walking upon the Sea of Galilee, Peter asked our Savior to bid that he come to Him over the water. Jesus complied, and Peter actually walked with his Master upon the waves; but suddenly he lost confidence and began to sink. Jesus took him by the hand, chiding him for his lack of faith; then, both Jesus and Peter got into the boat. It is evident that while Peter's request showed his love and confidence in his divine Master, there was in it also a want of reflection and a quite unnecessary zeal. Whenever there was question of thinking, speaking, acting, Peter took the initiative; he was ever stepping into the foreground. And now, in order to teach a lesson through Peter, our Savior permitted him to suffer the ordinary consequences of indiscreet zeal, namely, faintheartedness and discouragement. Seeing the violence of the wind and the tossing waves, Peter began to fear—and to sink. But, regaining confidence even in his danger, Peter cried out and grasped the hand held out to him. Our Savior said, "*O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*" And so the goodness of Jesus and Peter's cry of faith repaired the fault; but the instruction had been given.

Through this incident Peter and the others were also shown in advance and by figure the primacy of the Prince of the Apostles and in particular his infallibility. Peter was the



master of the ship. He alone had asked for a share in the miracle of his Master walking upon the lake, and he had obtained it. And when he began to sink, it was not his boat but his faith and the hand of Jesus that supported him. Jesus supports Peter by His power, Peter is attached to Jesus by faith and confidence. Together they enter the boat; together they assure the bark of the Church a secure and prosperous voyage.

The importance and the meaning of this incident concern the Church in general as well as each of her members in particular. We are admirably taught by it the wholly divine manner in which Jesus watches over His Church and protects her. If the vessel of the Church finds herself in dark waters, tossed about by the most violent storms, even if she seems left to herself, Jesus, her divine Master, is never unmindful of her. He is on the shore offering for her the prayer of the God-Man. To each of us, also, in due proportion, this event has a lesson to teach. First, there is the lesson of confidence always and in all things. Our God, our Savior, is here near us by His providence, and so we shall not give way to fear whatever may happen. Second, we learn from Peter to be on our guard against presumption, which soon turns to discouragement and faintheartedness. But if we should commit this fault, let us not lose hope, but call to Jesus for help. His hand is ever held out to us; let us grasp it by the prayer of faith.

“Raise us up, we beseech You, O Lord by the apostolic assistance of blessed Peter, Your Apostle, so that the weaker we are, the more mightily we may be helped by the power of his intercession; and that being perpetually defended by the same holy Apostle we may neither yield to any unquiet nor be overcome by any adversity” (*Raccolta*).

*The Promise of the Eucharist*



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“But Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life’” (Jn. 6:35).

The momentous discourse revealing the mystery of the Eucharist was delivered by our Savior near the time of the feast of the Passover in Capharnaum, one of the largest and most populous towns of Galilee. The audience was large both because of the place and the time of year, and also because of the miracle of the loaves, which had taken place the day before.

O Jesus, move my will to correspond with all Your graces, that I may receive also the light to understand Your words.

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It is probable that our Savior’s audience on this occasion was made up chiefly of those who had witnessed the miracle of the loaves the day before. We know from St. John that when the people looked for Jesus the next day at the scene of the miracle and found Him gone, they came by boat to Capharnaum seeking Him. They were still full of excitement and enthusiasm, the more so, perhaps, because they may have suspected that a new miracle had been wrought. They had noticed that the disciples had left without Jesus in the only boat that was available at the time. But Jesus did not answer their query as to when He had crossed the lake from the place where the multiplication of the loaves had occurred. His response to their question, “*Rabbi, when didst thou come here?*” was a grave admonition: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek me not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and have been filled. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that which*

*endures unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you.* His hearers understood that Jesus was promising them a Food much different from the miraculous loaves and that partaking of It involved meeting certain conditions; and so, thinking perhaps of certain works of piety, such as prayer, fasting, or almsgiving, they asked, *"What are we to do in order that we may perform the works of God?"* Jesus replied, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* Our Savior's first requirement is faith in His divinity.

At this point, when Jesus was endeavoring to lift His hearers to spiritual conceptions, there was an abrupt change in their attitude. They were no longer as well disposed as they had seemed to be at first. He was asking for faith and they, who had witnessed the miracle of the loaves as recently as the day before, now requested that He prove His claim by a miracle, one of their own choosing, such as the manna falling from heaven. *"Amen, amen, I say to you,"* Jesus answered, *"Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* The crowd's rejoinder, *"Lord, give us always this bread,"* seems an echo of the uncomprehending and somewhat ironical words of the Samaritan woman, *"Lord, give me of this water, that I may no longer thirst."* But the thought of the Savior continued to rise higher: *"I am the bread of life . . . I have come down from heaven."* Now there was murmuring in the crowd, encouraged, no doubt, by the Pharisees or their partisans; they spoke slightly of the birth and the family of Jesus. *"Is this not Jesus,"* they said, *"the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How, then, does he say, 'I have come down from*

heaven'?" Without entering upon any explanation with regard to the error about His birth, Jesus delicately but clearly indicated the reason for their want of faith; they had not that attraction, that special light, which only His heavenly Father could give. They had resisted the graces which had already been bestowed on them and which, had they not been received in vain, would now have resulted in spiritual enlightenment.

O Jesus, Your words are filled with profound mystery and they are full of difficulties for us; but it is not ours to resolve these difficulties. We have only to accept what You affirm, since You are who You are. Protect my soul and body from eternal death through Your Sacrament of life; and through my daily union with You in the Eucharist let me be transformed spiritually into You, living through You the divine life as You live the life of the Father by Your union with Him.

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AUGUST 20

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*The Test of Faith*



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"Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe and who it was who should betray him" (Jn. 6:65).

See the crowd and even many of the disciples of Jesus turning away and leaving His company after His discourse on the Eucharist.

Divine Savior, let my desire of growing in intimacy with You survive the test of the "hard sayings" that contradict my pride and self-will.

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As for the disciples of Jesus, the mystery of the Eucharist shocked them. Our Savior tried to reassure them. He spoke of His glorious ascension: "*What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?*" He explained that all things were possible for Him, since He was divine; that His promise, while it was literally true, was not to be taken in a carnal, material sense: "*It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*" But still many of the disciples persisted in their opposition. Jesus saw the reason for their incredulity, like that of the crowd, in the lack of special light: *And he said, "This is why I have said to you, 'No one can come to me unless he is enabled to do so by my Father.'*" It is not that God hides His truths from us, but our pride prevents us from discerning the light which would reveal them to us. Many of the disciples, therefore, openly defected and followed Jesus no longer. What sorrow their apostasy must have caused Him!

Then, when the continuing desertion of His followers made it seem possible to fear that even the Apostles might be tempted to discouragement, our Savior judged it well to test their faith also. Turning lovingly to the Twelve, He asked, "*Do you also wish to go away?*" One feels in this question the full gravity of the situation, the sadness and grief of the Heart of Jesus. Peter, always full of faith and zeal, was the first to cry out in the name of all, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life and we have come to believe and to know that thou art the Christ, the Son of God.*" So courageous and explicit a confession of faith must have greatly consoled the Sacred Heart, but His joy was not complete. Peter had thought that in affirming his own faith he was speaking for all; but Jesus

said, "*Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.*" He was speaking of Judas. Our Savior's words would seem to imply that Judas had lost his faith (perhaps on this occasion) and would now enter upon the woeful path leading to the betrayal and to suicide.

The day of the great discourse on the Eucharist in the synagogue of Capharnaum was a memorable and crucial one, both for our Savior and for the Church He had come to establish. At the time of the feast of the Passover a year from that time, the Sacrament of the Eucharist was to be instituted. And the three mysteries which formed the prelude, so to speak, to this Pasch, namely, the multiplication of the loaves, the walking upon the water, the promise of the Eucharist, were as a foreshadowing of the events of that last Pasch. Then our Savior would institute the Sacrament of the Altar, the imperishable food which endures unto life everlasting; then His Heart would be wounded by the faintheartedness and fear of Peter which again would follow a burst of indiscreet zeal. Finally, the defection of His own together with the hatred of His enemies, which on that day in Capharnaum was already crystallizing, would then nail Jesus to the cross. Even thus early these mournful events were being prepared; already there was a decisive change, a division which showed itself even among His disciples.

O Jesus, how many there are still who abandon You, because You do not will to be as their earthly desires would have You! But to whom will they go? You alone have the words of everlasting life. O heavenly Father, reveal to us Your Son, draw us to Him, give us to Him!

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*The Paralytic of Bethsaida*

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“Now there is at Jerusalem, by the Sheepgate, a pool called in Hebrew Bethsaida, having five porticoes. . . . Now a certain man was there who had been thirty-eight years under his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew he had been in this state a long time, he said to him, ‘Dost thou want to get well?’” (Jn. 5:2-6)

Jesus had come to Jerusalem to celebrate a certain feast, probably the Passover. On a Sabbath day in the course of the festival He visited the sick lying under the porticoes bordering the sides of the pool of Bethsaida.

Divine Savior, teach me how to observe due discretion in my works of charity. ~

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Among the afflicted lying near the pool of Bethsaida on the occasion of this visit of our Savior was the truly pitiable case of a man who had suffered from his infirmity for thirty-eight years. He was placed quite near the pool where he must have lain innumerable times waiting for the *troubling of the water*. But always he had waited to no purpose, for no one came to help him, and always someone else entered the pool before him. Jesus, knowing all by His omniscience, was touched with compassion and He now came to relieve the misery of this afflicted and helpless man. Yet, there was a certain reserve in our Savior’s manner of performing this miracle. He did not, as in other instances, exact faith from the sick man; He asked only, “*Dost thou want to get well?*” The paralytic did not know Jesus, and Jesus, for the present,

did not wish to make Himself known to him. But His kindly question had the effect of directing the sick man's attention to our Savior as a source of help and of arousing his confidence. Moreover, Jesus cured this man without touching him, without any of the outward signs which so often accompanied His miraculous cures. He merely said, "*Rise, take up thy pallet and walk.*" Then, after the cure, Jesus disappeared immediately into the crowd.

The cure was made public, however, by the fact that the former paralytic, either because he was distracted with joy or because he had so understood our Savior's order, carried his pallet, even, perhaps, through the streets of Jerusalem. The Pharisees stopped him and forbade him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. The answer of the paralytic, "*He who made me well said to me, 'Take up thy pallet and walk,'*" should have made it clear that He who is master of life and death is also master of the Sabbath. But the Pharisees, not wishing to hear more about the miracle, were anxious only to know who had permitted this man to carry his bed on the Sabbath; but he did not know the name of His Benefactor. Afterward, Jesus, quietly and inconspicuously, made Himself known to him in the Temple, where our Good Shepherd had gone for the purpose of curing the soul of the paralytic as well. We may reasonably suppose that his ill-health had resulted from a sinful life, since Jesus admonished him to sin no more lest a worse evil befall him.

Then the man went his way and, prompted either by a grateful desire to bear witness to the Savior or merely to answer the question which had been put to him, *told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.* This entire incident bears a special character of discretion and reserve in the conduct of our Savior, quite in contrast to His be-



havior at the first Pasch of His public life, when He drove the vendors from the temple. It seems evident that He did not wish to provoke His enemies unnecessarily. Yet the cure of the paralytic so scandalized and infuriated the Pharisees that they *kept persecuting Jesus and were seeking the more to put him to death*. This miracle, then, opens another and a deadly phase in the active hostility of the Pharisees against the Savior.

O Jesus, so compassionate, bountiful and good, come to my soul and, in Your mercy and power, heal its sluggishness and give it new life and vigor in Your service. Help me, also, good Jesus, to learn from You how to practice prudence and moderation in thought, word, and deed.

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*The Immaculate Heart of Mary*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 838)

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*The Unity of Christ and the Father*



“Jesus, however, answered them, ‘My Father works even until now, and I work.’ This, then, is why the Jews were seeking the more to put him to death; because he was not only

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breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (Jn. 5:17, 18).

The open persecution of the Jews, whose ultimate objective was the death of Jesus, probably took the form at first of such disputes as they now held with Him in the Temple, in which they accused Him both of violating the Sabbath by curing the paralytic and of committing blasphemy by calling God His Father and thus making Himself equal to God.

O Jesus, grant me the assistance of Your Holy Spirit that I may hear Your words with understanding and docility of heart.

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Jesus had clearly and definitely asserted that His works were the works of the Father. They did not merely imitate the works of the Father; they *were* the works of the Father. God rested on the seventh day, and His repose, which was the figure and principle of the Sabbath rest, had been applied by the Scribes to the Sabbath observance in the sense of complete passivity; but wrongly so, for even after the creation of the world God continued to act in conserving it. His activity continued in both the natural and supernatural orders. And when the Father acts, the Son acts also in virtue of His unity of nature with the Father. The works of Jesus are truly the works of His heavenly Father, because the Father and He have the same nature, the same life, the same knowledge, the same will and action, with the sole difference that the Father possesses all these things without their being communicated to Him by another Person, while the Son has them by communication from the Father.

It is also to be noted that when He is speaking of Himself with reference to God, our Savior says *my Father*; and when speaking to His disciples of God, He says *your Father*. Jesus never used the expression *our Father* except when He was

teaching His disciples the prayer which *they* were to say. His divine Sonship is not on the same plane as theirs and ours; it is unique. The meaning of our Lord's answer did not escape His hearers; hatred had given them insight. They understood that Jesus was declaring that He was God. His miracles up to this time supported the truth of this claim. They should have cast themselves at His feet in adoration, but, on the contrary, from that time on *the Jews were seeking the more to put him to death; because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.*

On the part of our Savior, this incident marks an important advance in His revelation of His Person and His mission. At the first Pasch He had spoken of His divinity in an obscure and passing way, when He said that the Jews were making the house of His Father a place of traffic. Now He openly declared His divinity, revealing that between the Father and Himself there was identity of essence, of life, and of action. In His instruction on this occasion Jesus summed up, so to speak, all the riches and profundity of His divinity, all the scope of His power, all His majesty as the Incarnate God, insofar as these mysteries are revealed to us in Scripture. And while He would appear to have taken care in healing the paralytic not to provoke the Pharisees, now that they had proposed the issue, He spoke plainly and unmistakably; and He did this at Jerusalem, in public and facing His enemies.

O divine Master, the Jews looked upon Your face, the face of the Incarnate Son of God; and they heard Your divine voice, but they only became more hardened in their unbelief, because Your word was not living and active in their souls. All the testimonies of the Scriptures of St. John the Baptist, of Your

own teaching and miracles, of the Father Himself were for them as though these divine testimonies had never been given. Let not my prejudices and my vanities keep me from receiving and embracing in their full import all Your teachings, especially those on the counsels, and those other doctrines of Yours that are so opposed to our corrupt tendencies: on abnegation, on the acceptance of the cross, on universal charity.

AUGUST 24

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### *The Canaanite Woman*



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“And going away from there, Jesus retired to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman came out of that territory and cried, saying to him, ‘Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is sorely beset by a devil’” (Mt. 15:21-23).

In order to avoid the growing hostility of the Pharisees, Jesus had withdrawn from Galilee to the borders of Phoenicia. He wished to keep His presence there secret, but this was impossible. *Immediately*, St. Mark tells us, *a woman . . . came in and fell down at his feet.*

Good Jesus, keep my faith and trust firm when, through no fault of my own, You withhold Your consolation.

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This Canaanite woman was a Syro-Phoenician, a pagan. She appears to have been a cultivated person of high rank. In great distress she implored our Savior to deliver her daughter from a devil who was cruelly tormenting her. Jesus gave her no answer and to the Apostles who interceded for her He said, “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the*

*house of Israel.*" Finally, however, yet only after another stern repulse, He heard the woman's prayer. Here we may contemplate three perfections in our Savior: His fidelity, integrity, and wisdom respecting His mission. Although the work of redemption undertaken by Christ covered the whole world, His immediate personal mission was limited to the Jewish people. This was the will of the Father; and what limits this will set to the ministry of Jesus!

Entirely obedient and faithful in word and action, Jesus scarcely left the territorial boundaries traced out for Him; and when He did, He exercised His ministry not officially but, as it were, in passing. It was not Jesus but the Apostles who would go to the Gentiles. And yet, what an unfaithful flock was Israel, of whom He had said through Isaias, *I have spread forth my hands all the day to an unbelieving people.* His Sacred Heart saw and loved among the Gentiles the sheep who were to be of His flock, but He willed to exercise prudence so as not to expose Himself unnecessarily to the reproaches of the Jews. It is probable that for this reason He did not heed the solicitations of His Apostles on behalf of this suppliant. Moreover, He was aware of her exceptional strength of soul, and perhaps He desired to give her the opportunity to show the full stature of her faith.

There is an important lesson for us in this seeming indifference of Jesus to the Canaanite woman. We observe that when she cried after Him on the road, He gave no sign that He had even heard her; neither by word nor glance did He respond to her entreaties. When she came to Him in the house, He told her severely that *it is not fair to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs.* These were surely stern, cold words from the lips of our good and loving Jesus, but He treated this pagan woman in this way for her

instruction and ours. There can be nothing more advantageous for the soul than to meet with occasions which demand its practicing perseverance, co-operating earnestly and seriously with grace, purifying its dispositions — occasions, in a word, which bring the soul into direct contact with trial and humiliation. Such exercise is the best preparation for grace. And so it was with the Canaanite woman. She survived the test, and the goodness and power of Jesus could no longer withstand such confidence, perseverance, and humility: "*O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be done to thee as thou wilt,*" said our Savior, and from a distance He worked the miracle. The possessed girl was immediately set free.

O my Savior, the faith of this Canaanite woman, like the faith of the Roman centurion, drew from Your divine lips a cry of admiration. These pagans gave You the humble, unquestioning faith that You sought for in vain among the Chosen People. What a salutary lesson there is in this for me! The fact that I am a religious, consecrated by vow to Your special service, does not of itself make me better than others who are living in the world. There may be very many in the world whose virtues are rewarded by far more choice graces than I in my pride and complacency will ever be disposed to receive. Help me, good Jesus, to be a religious after Your own heart!

AUGUST 25

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*Virtues of the Canaanite Woman*



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"But she came and worshipped him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' He said in answer, 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.' But she said, 'Yes, Lord; for even the

dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be done to thee as thou wilt' " (Mt. 15:26-28).

Picture the Canaanite woman before our Lord.

Good Jesus, grant to my prayer the graces of humility and perseverance which You gave the Canaanite woman.

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In the Canaanite woman we may study several beautiful virtues. First, there is her great and unselfish love for her child. She saw her daughter in the dread power of the devil, and like pagans in general she was at a loss how to deal with this terrible misfortune. She felt her child's misery as keenly as if it were her own. "*Lord, help me!*" she cried to Jesus. It was love that made her so ingenious, so firm and persevering. Second and chiefly, this woman showed a most extraordinary faith. She addressed our Savior as *Lord* and *Son of David*. These are significant appellations. This woman may have been among the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon who heard the Sermon on the Mount; in any event, the fame of our Savior's miracles had spread far and wide, and it is probable that she comprehended partly at least the significance of the titles she used in her petition. Moreover, it seems clear that she had shown herself worthy of graces of faith which had not been granted even to the Jews. As the prophet Elias had to go to Sidon, to the city of Sarepta, that is, among pagans, so it is likewise with our Savior.

The humility of the Canaanite woman is also particularly moving. No one else had been tried by Jesus so severely in this respect. He allowed her to beg and entreat on the public highway without deigning to give her even a look. The Apostles themselves were moved to pity, but Jesus reproved them for speaking in her behalf. Yet she, like the blind men

of Capernaum, continued to follow Him even into the house and there she cast herself at His feet. Then it was that she received the most discouraging and humiliating refusal of all. But let us notice the response of this pagan, whom we may infer was wealthy, educated, and of high rank, to the unwonted severity of Jesus. She was conscious of her unworthiness; she acknowledged it, but she parried our Savior's stern words in a manner so apt and winning that He was disarmed. There was in her rejoinder a most charming ingenuity united with humble confidence.

What joy for our Savior to find such a heart! And He who wanted nothing more than to allow Himself to be overcome, said to her kindly and with admiration, "*Because of this answer, go thy way; the devil has gone out of thy daughter.*" Jesus Himself had been working within her, filling her soul with faith and love at the very moment when, by word and gesture, He was repulsing her. This was the reason for her marvelous faith; and so marvelous was it that our Savior Himself was in admiration of what He had brought to pass. He was captivated, as it were, by the beauty of His own work.

Impress deeply upon my mind, O good Jesus, the meaning of this mystery. Surely You wish to teach me in it, first of all, what prayer animated by faith, persevering prayer, prayer full of humility can do, even when it is God who resists. Second, You remind me in a striking manner that I must not try to avoid humiliations or accept them with a bad grace. I need both of these lessons, for I am inclined to pray with more insistence and impatience than perseverance; and if I do not run away from humiliations, I fear that I am not often graceful in the acceptance of them. Help me, dear Jesus, to bring joy and consolation to Your Sacred Heart by my practice of the virtues of the Canaanite woman.



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*The Deaf-Mute*

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“And they brought to him one deaf and dumb and entreated him to lay his hand upon him” (Mk. 7:32).

Jesus, returning from the district of Tyre by way of Sidon to the sea of Galilee, was passing through the region of the Decapolis; here a deaf-mute was brought to Him for a cure.

*“Lord, if thou wilt thou canst cure me.”*

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Jesus was entreated by the friends of the deaf man, who was also suffering from an impediment in his speech, to lay His hands upon him. Their request showed their faith in our Savior’s power; yet they appear to have been under the impression that the laying on of His hands possessed a special efficacy and was indispensable. But, as in the case of the daughter of Jairus, our Savior performed this cure in the manner that He Himself saw fit. Also, as in the raising of the daughter of Jairus, He did not permit the crowd to witness the cure; but, taking the man by himself and in the presence of the disciples only, He put His fingers into the deaf ears and touched the man’s lips with spittle from His own mouth. Then, raising His eyes to heaven and sighing, He uttered the Syriac word, *Ephpheta*, which means, *Be thou opened*. How intimate and personal was the contact of the divine perfection of Jesus with the infirmity of this man!

Our Savior had put a legion of devils to flight with a word; He had cured the centurion’s servant and the daughter of the Canaanite woman from a distance. Why, then, did

He perform this miracle, as it were, with effort? Perhaps His elaborate procedure was meant to arouse faith in the deaf and dumb man, but surely it was also intended for the instruction of the disciples who were eyewitnesses and for our instruction as well. Jesus wished to show the disciples and us that the Sacred Humanity served as an instrument of the Divinity, that it was the divine Person of the Word who healed; but that to work the marvels, the Word used the human nature that was united to Him. Life proceeding from the Divinity reached the bodies and souls of men through the Sacred Humanity.

Again, by His example on this occasion, Jesus implicitly approved the external ceremonies of the Church, especially in her administration of the sacraments. The ritual of Baptism, for example, offers a striking parallel to our Savior's manner of performing this cure. The priest touches with saliva the ears and nostrils of the person to be baptized and uses the same Syriac word which Jesus employed. The divine precedent for the ceremonies of the Church should make us always reverent in witnessing them, and by our prayerful attention to the outward signs, we should pass to the supernatural realities they represent. We are also led to infer from our Savior's actions in this mystery that it is not a simple matter to cure one who is deaf or mute with regard to spiritual things. He must go apart from the crowd and seek retreat and recollection. His ears must be filled with the teachings of Jesus by the operation of the Holy Spirit, *the finger of God's hand*. He must relish no longer the things of earth, but the things of God. He must look to heaven for assistance and with Jesus sigh to be heard. Finally, Jesus Himself must give the word of command and apply His merits to the soul.

Jesus, my Lord and Savior, this afflicted man gave evidence of his perfect cure by showing that he could hear and speak aright. So many times Your mercy and grace have touched my soul in the Sacrament of Penance and in Holy Communion, in spiritual reading, and in the words and example of others; but what change has taken place in me? I fear that too often I still speak the language of the world, of impatience and dislike, of criticism and gossip; nor am I quick to hear and heed Your inspirations. Good Jesus, let me not remain infirm under the very ministrations of Your sovereign power. Open my ears and loose my tongue, that from now on I may hear and speak *correctly*.

AUGUST 27

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*The Second Multiplication of the Loaves*



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“In those days when again there was a great crowd, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples together and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away to their homes fasting, they will faint on the way, for some of them have come from a distance’” (Mk. 8:1-3).

Our Savior wished the Jews to see in Him a prophet not inferior to Moses, and so He worked twice and under similar circumstances the miracle that had been performed at the prayer of Moses in the desert. Besides, this miracle was a preparation for the institution of the Eucharist which the bread, like the manna that fell in the desert foreshadowed and prefigured.

Divine Savior, fill me with living faith and gratitude when I prepare to receive You in daily Communion.

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The common principle of the three miracles, the Eucharist, the multiplication of the loaves, and the manna, is the mercy and love of God. Israel without food in the *desert, vast and fearful wilderness* and the famished crowd in the lonely plain on the borders of Lake Genesareth, with their sick and infirm, their blind and paralytic, represent the Church and all humanity. *The food that perishes* is unable to satisfy the needs of the soul. If our Savior did not come to our aid with the Bread of life, we should *faint on the way*, for we come from afar and we all have a long road to travel. Furthermore, in both the miracle of the manna and that of the loaves, the bread was miraculously renewed. The manna, which Scripture also terms significantly *bread from heaven* and *bread of angels*, fell anew from heaven every day; and in the case of the four thousand, all partook of the same seven loaves distributed by the disciples; and this number of loaves was miraculously sufficient for all. But the Eucharist is far more wonderful. It is always the same Bread, not by multiplication, but by transubstantiation; It is the Body of Christ, who not only is present by a wondrous act of His divine power, but continues His Eucharistic presence by a succession of wonders; we all receive this Bread of life, but the supply is never exhausted.

Again, the effects of the loaves and the manna and those of the Eucharist are similar. Although the immediate result of the miracles of the manna and the loaves, prompted as they were by our Savior's tender concern for the body as well as the soul, was a temporal good, yet it was not unrelated to spiritual benefit. Jesus intended, by repeating the prodigy, to revive the spiritual life of His people, to awaken their faith, and draw them to Himself. And the Eucharist, while it is above all the food of the soul, it is also the seed

of immortality, the pledge and guarantee of the glorious transfiguration of the body. Moreover, all the Israelites were filled to satiety by the manna that fell in the desert; but, while some responded with gratitude, others scorned this food from heaven, saying, "*We are disgusted with this wretched food*"; they murmured and lost faith in the Lord God. What happened in the desert was repeated in the case of the throng fed by our Savior on the bank of Lake Genesareth; for they too later lost faith and abandoned Him. Perhaps our loyalty is not more enduring than that of the Jews of old when Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion. We hold out our hands for His gifts—greater strength of soul, a more ardent love—yet, how disloyal we often are when the test comes.

Divine Savior, grant that I may receive You today in Holy Communion with greater recollection and more fruitfully than ever before. Make my dispositions like those of the crowd who followed You for three days without thinking of any temporal interest in their eagerness to hear Your words and to be healed by You. Let me prepare for each day's Holy Communion by living in the constant desire of spiritual goods and in closest union with You.

AUGUST 28

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*The Leaven of the Pharisees*



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"And he said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees'" (Mt. 16:6).

Our Savior and His Apostles were sailing across Lake Tiberias from Magadan or Dalmanutha, where the Sadducees and

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Pharisees had demanded that Jesus show them a sign from heaven.

Divine Master, help me to come to know You as You are.

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During the passage across the lake or upon arrival at their destination, our Savior said to His Apostles, "*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*" It would seem that this warning was prompted by His sad reflections upon the malice and corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were making common cause against Him and were even now actively scheming against His life. St. Mark records that just prior to leaving Magadan, following the insolent demand of the Pharisees and Sadducees for a sign from heaven, Jesus sighed deeply in spirit and said, "*Why does this generation demand a sign? Amen I say to you, a sign shall not be given to this generation.*" And so we may infer that during the voyage across the lake He was preoccupied with somber meditation upon the blindness of His enemies and the disasters into which they were leading His people. His warning to the Apostles is, as it were, a conclusion to these reflections, which He expressed aloud in order to put His followers on their guard against this deadly contagion.

The Twelve took our Savior's words in a literal sense. They concluded that Jesus was referring to their having forgotten to bring bread with them, and that he was forbidding them to eat the bread of the Pharisees. And so they became troubled and argued among themselves, each trying, perhaps, to shift the responsibility for the oversight from himself to the others. Possibly, too, they asked each other how they were to live from now on if they were forbidden to buy the bread used by the Pharisees and Sadducees, or how

they were to procure their food. "*We have brought no bread,*" they said. Jesus had only very recently fed the four thousand miraculously; yet here, in His very presence, the Twelve were showing lively anxiety over a matter of a little bread. Deservedly did our Savior rebuke them: "*You of little faith, why do you argue among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves among five thousand men, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves among four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?*" Then Jesus corrected the error of the Apostles by explaining that He did not refer to the leaven used in the making of bread, but to the leaven which can enter the heart, that is, the spirit of the Pharisees which He had characterized on another occasion as the leaven of hypocrisy. The grave tone of our Savior's admonition shows how uneasiness over and preoccupation with temporal matters displeases Him, because such anxiety always arises from want of trust in Him.

Divine Savior, I marvel that Your Apostles, who lived so intimately with You, who were the happy witnesses of Your life and miracles, moved, as it were, in so different an atmosphere from Yours. Your thoughts were taken up with the things of the spirit; they were anxious about nourishment for their bodies. They had not forgotten the two miracles of the loaves, since, according to Your Evangelist, St. Mark, they immediately and accurately answered Your questions as to the number of baskets of fragments they had gathered up. Then why were they so slow of understanding? Perhaps their greatest fault lay in their not reflecting upon what they saw and heard, but in satisfying themselves merely with witnessing Your wonderful works. But if they were still in great need of Your instruction, my need is even greater. I too am inclined to allow my spiritual perceptions to become dulled with earthly pre-

occupations; consequently, I too often misunderstand Your action in my life and so become troubled and uneasy. Enlighten the darkness of my mind, good Jesus, so that all that happens to me will raise me up to You, instead of turning me back upon myself or my earthly cares.

AUGUST 29

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*The Blind Man of Bethsaida*



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“And they came to Bethsaida and they brought him a blind man and entreated him to touch him” (Mk. 8:22).

When our Savior disembarked at Bethsaida Julias on the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias, He was met by certain persons who were bringing a blind man to Him for a cure.

O Jesus, let not negligence on my part keep Your light from penetrating the darkness of my mind.

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St. Mark expressly observes that Jesus personally led the blind man outside the town before curing him. This may have been done to arouse the proper dispositions in this afflicted man by a special act of kindly interest and also, perhaps, to keep the miracle secret. Once outside the town, our Savior applied saliva to the eyes of the blind man, laid His hands upon him and asked, as if He did not know, whether he could see. The blind man answered that he saw men walking who looked to him like trees; that is to say, the images were still confused and indistinct. But when Jesus had laid His hands upon the man's eyes a second time he saw everything clearly. Why was this cure performed



only gradually? Perhaps the faith and confidence of the blind man were not sufficiently strong. He himself had not asked our Lord for a cure, but others had led him to Jesus and had interceded for him. As he partially recovered his sight, his faith increased, however, and he cried out with joy that he already saw men walking about; then, at last, his full power of vision was restored.

The cured man was then instructed to go to his home and, if he passed through the village, to tell no one of his cure. It was our Savior's wish to conceal this miracle from public knowledge. He was in pagan country and so the cure was a work of merciful compassion, not an act connected with His public mission. Besides, if popular enthusiasm were aroused by this miracle, it would call forth new and sharper hostility from His enemies, since He had only a short time before refused to give the Pharisees and Sadducees the sign from heaven for which they had asked. The cure was, in fact, almost hidden from the Apostles themselves, by reason of the blind man's gradual improvement and the use of saliva, whose natural properties were thought to be beneficial when applied to diseased eyes.

It is also worthy of note that St. Mark alone gives us an account of this cure. Of all the Evangelists, St. Mark draws attention most often to the Apostles' slowness of understanding. In describing the gradual healing of the blind man, he may have meant to suggest a parallel in the slowness with which the Master's lessons penetrated the minds of the Apostles. Gradual increase of light is a natural symbol of the mind's slowly increasing grasp of truth. The enlightenment of the Apostles would be achieved by many and repeated instructions; and so in this parablelike miracle we may discover certain qualities of our Savior's method of teach-

ing: His prudence and gentleness, the appropriateness, economy, and effectiveness of the means He used, His compassionate personal interest.

My good Master, like the blind man I am often wanting in faith and even in the awareness of my spiritual miseries. Perhaps the charity of others' prayers have many times drawn Your merciful glance to my poor soul. Help me to profit by each precious new light that I receive through Your great goodness. Let each advance in the knowledge and love of Your law prepare me for the next, until You have called me wholly out of darkness into Your marvelous light.

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AUGUST 30

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*Peter's Profession of Faith*



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"Now Jesus, having come into the district of Caesarea Philippi, began to ask his disciples, saying, 'Who do men say the Son of Man is?' But they said, 'Some say, John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" Simon Peter answered, and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Mt. 16:13-16).

After the cure of the blind man Jesus continued His journey northward to Caesarea Philippi. He does not seem to have entered the town, but upon approaching it, withdrew from His Apostles to be alone with His Father; then they rejoined Him in the environs of Caesarea Philippi.

Divine Master, bestow supernatural vigor upon my soul, and grant me a greater zeal to make You known and loved.

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It was quite late in His public life that our Savior questioned His Apostles as to who the people in general and they themselves in particular considered Him to be. Most of the prophecies concerning Him had been realized and the time of the passion was drawing near. The exceptional solemnity of the moment is further marked by St. Luke's observation that our Savior had previously been at prayer by Himself and also by the fact that only the Apostles were present at this interview. Our Savior first asked the Apostles what others thought of Him. This He did, not because He needed to be informed, but to prepare them for the question He was about to address to them. From their answer it is clear that among the people Jesus was not regarded as an ordinary man. Some took Him for Elias, others for John the Baptist, others again for Jeremias or one of the prophets. The common element in these diverse opinions is the conception of our Savior as a messenger or herald of the kingdom of the Messias, an ambassador of God.

To the second question of Jesus, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Peter replied, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This question, like the first, had been addressed to all, but Peter answered without even stopping to ascertain the opinion of the rest. "When Jesus asked them the opinion of the people, they all made answer," comments St. John Chrysostom. "When He asks them what they themselves think, Peter alone breaks in and forestalls the rest." True to his habit of taking the initiative, he spoke from his eager impulsive heart; but he was also conscious of an interior light which the others, perhaps, did not possess in the same degree.

This testimony given by Peter on behalf of his own personal conviction, although in the name of the others, is a most

thrilling and magnificent profession of faith. It is as a résumé of all that Christian revelation teaches concerning the God-Man. Peter professes his faith, first, in the Incarnation: "*Thou,*" Jesus of Nazareth, whom I behold before my eyes. He acknowledges the mission and functions of the sacred humanity of the Savior: "*Thou art the Christ,*" that is, the Anointed One, the Messias, therefore Priest, Prophet, and King. In the opinion of many students of the Gospel he also bore witness on this occasion to the divinity of Jesus: "*Thou art . . . the Son of the living God.*" This is not the first time that Jesus had heard Himself hailed as *Son of God*; but, in general, those who had accorded Him this title previously had used it in the sense of someone favored by God, entrusted with His authority and power. Peter, however, made his ringing declaration with full and entire awareness of what he was asserting in such solemn tones and with heartfelt conviction of its truth.

O great St. Peter, I can almost see you before me, on fire with the Holy Spirit, coming forward in the name of the other Apostles as well as in your own name and giving your divine Master this glorious testimony of faith. Never has a Roman Pontiff pronounced a doctrinal decision in a manner more sublime. I long to imitate your wholehearted and spontaneous co-operation with grace. Obtain for my soul, good St. Peter, the vigor and boldness I so greatly need in order to proclaim by every word and deed the sovereign authority over me of Him who is your Master and mine.

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*The Primacy of Peter Announced*

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“Then Jesus answered and said, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father in heaven. And I say to thee, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ ” (Mt. 16:17-19).

Jesus, hailed by Peter as the Son of God, addressed Peter in turn, calling him by his full name to emphasize the importance of what He was about to say, thus immortalizing the name of Jona. Here also, for the first time in the Gospel, Jesus uses the term, *my Church*.

Divine Savior, grant me an unswerving faith and loyalty to Your holy Church and to her visible Head.

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Had He not been really the Son of God, Jesus would have shown a holy indignation at Peter’s bold words; instead He confirmed Peter’s testimony, attributing it not to human insight, but to a supernatural inspiration. It was not flesh and blood that had revealed these truths to Peter, but the heavenly Father Himself. “*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona,*” said our Savior; blessed because of your faith, blessed in the fruits of this great profession of it, that is, in your intimate union with Me and My kingdom, which is to be expressed by the primacy; blessed in the sanctity that is to be yours, in the martyrdom that awaits you, in the glory you will have

in heaven. This is the only time it is recorded that Christ ever directly hailed as blessed a definite individual. Perhaps we may see herein the origin of the title given to the popes, *Beatissime Pater*.

*"And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church"*: You have called me Christ, the Son of the living God, and now I speak to you as God when I call you Peter (*Kepha*) and make of you the rock (*Kepha*), the foundation of my Church, upon which it will be built. The essence of the primacy of Peter is in the fact that it underlies as a foundation the structure of the Church: her doctrine, sacraments, pastoral authority, the Church teaching and the Church taught. *"And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The Church is impregnable to all attacks from without, whether from men or demons, whether in the form of heresy, schism, persecution, sin, or sacrilege. These strong foes are the *gates* (i.e., in the Semitic idiom, "the powers") of *hell*, but all their violence unleashed will not prevail against the foundation which supports the Church; nor, consequently, against the Church herself.

*"And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."* Peter, the head of the earthly kingdom of Christ, receives the universal power of the keys, that is, all powers necessary for the well-being of the kingdom, just as every master of a house entrusts his keys to a faithful steward during his absence. And since the earthly kingdom is founded merely as a preparation for the heavenly kingdom, whatever measures Peter takes on earth will be ratified in heaven. If he "binds," the sentence holds good in heaven; if he "looses," pardon is granted in heaven. What value and importance this mystery should have for us, the children of the Church! The promise of Jesus on this occasion assured her of a supreme head in

Peter and made her one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Moreover, the words of our Savior showed more forcibly and concretely than ever that the Old Dispensation had been replaced by the New in the establishment of a new Church.

Yes, O Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

You speak the words of God and show the power of God.

I affirm this perhaps with even more assurance than St. Peter

at the moment of his great profession of faith, because I have

seen Your promises fulfilled. With certitude, with enthusiasm,

I proclaim my faith and I thank You, my God, for giving me

this faith in You, in Peter, and in Your Church.





SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER—NOVEMBER



*First Prediction of the Passion*



“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and Scribes, and be put to death, and after three days rise again” (Mk. 8:31).

Less than a year before it was to take place, Jesus for the first time spoke openly to the Apostles about His passion. According to St. Matthew’s account our Savior also tells the Apostles at this time that the passion will take place at Jerusalem, the city indicated by the prophets as the scene of the revelation and the glory of the Messias.

O Jesus, make clear to me wherein my thoughts and judgments do not yet savor of *the things of God*.

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The words *Jerusalem, chief priests, suffer, and death* were for the Apostles as so many thunderbolts. Peter, according to his habit, again acted at once as the interpreter of the others’ thoughts. With a touch of that presumptuousness which was the defect of his resolute character, he undertook to cheer his Master and even to rebuke Him. *And Peter, taking him aside*, writes St. Mark, *began to chide him, saying, “Far be it from thee, O Lord; this will never happen to thee.”* Peter, so recently filled with the Holy Spirit and so gloriously enlightened by the Father, now was only the mouthpiece for natural and ordinary aspirations. It is true that his words were dictated by his great affection for his Master, but his love was imperfect, as Jesus expressly told him. Perhaps there was also a touch of self-seeking in Peter’s

remonstrance; he found it a disagreeable thought, perhaps, that he should be the representative of a humiliated and suffering Master. In this instance, surely, it was *flesh and blood* that spoke in Peter, that is, the natural fear of the cross and of suffering; and mingled with this sentiment, no doubt, was the false idea of the Jews concerning the Messiah. That Peter was not alone in this latter misconception may be inferred from the manner in which our Savior gives His reprimand. It appears to have been intended for more than the poor Apostle who was singled out by name, for St. Mark says, *But he, turning and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan, for thou dost not mind the things of God, but those of men."*

The rebuke of Jesus was grave, stern, forthright. Peter, who had been declared by Jesus to be the foundation of His Church and His own Vicar, who had so recently been proclaimed *blessed*, is now by the same divine lips called *Satan*, the enemy of the merciful designs of God for the salvation of mankind. Consequently, Peter merited also to be termed a *scandal*, that is, a "stumbling block," because he presumed to assert what would be best for Christ. The reprimand was sharp, however, less because of Peter's fault itself, which was prompted by a natural impulse of human feeling, than because of the spirit which the Apostle was unconsciously obeying. It was this spirit that Jesus strongly condemned in Peter and in the other Apostles. It is this spirit that He condemns in us, insofar as we are guilty of it. It is the tendency which, in Satan's hands, becomes a temptation, to oppose our own will to the will of God.

Divine Master, to my shame I must confess that, like Peter, I have not yet learned to *mind the things of God* rather than *those of men*. Too often I turn aside from the cross and from

sacrifice; too willingly I consent to the reducing of my practice of Christianity and the obligations of the religious life to a comfortable human thing. Forgive me, my Savior, and deign to raise and supernaturalize my thoughts and desires, so that from now on I may love and relish only *the things of God*.

SEPTEMBER 2

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## *Jesus Transfigured*



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“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John, and led them up to a high mountain by themselves” (Mt. 17:1).

In order to revive the courage of the Apostles after His first prediction of the passion and to strengthen their faith in His divinity and His glory to come, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to Mount Tabor. There they were to spend the night in prayer.

Divine Savior, grant me fresh zeal in Your service and courage to endure for Your sake all that is painful to nature. Thus I may deserve to be glorified by You on the day of the resurrection.

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Jesus took three of His Apostles, Peter, James, and John, as witnesses of the Transfiguration, because this was the number of witnesses required by Jewish law. Furthermore, these three were to be particularly exposed to the scandal of the passion. When they arrived at the mountain, Jesus betook Himself to prayer and the Three followed His example; but, as the prayer was prolonged, they fell asleep. When they awoke, they beheld the Savior already trans-

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figured. His whole Person flashed forth light. *His face shone as the sun* and His garments were *white as snow*. At the right and left of the glorified Messiah stood the two great representatives of the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elias.

The awesomeness of the scene may be imagined from its effect upon the Apostles. They were speechless with fear. Only Peter, carried out of himself, exclaimed, "*Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And let us set up three tents, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*" But to be transfixed in ecstasy is not the condition of this life. Peter had yet to learn that he must die for his Master, before he could rest eternally with Him in His glory. And while he was still speaking, a luminous cloud enveloped them; *and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear him."* More frightened than ever, the Apostles fell face down on the ground. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "*Arise, and do not be afraid.*" Then, looking up, *they saw no one but Jesus only.*

To convince the Apostles of the reality of the glory He had promised them, Jesus had not only allowed a reflection of it to appear in His own Person and in the two prophets, but He permitted the Apostles themselves a little taste of the rapture He gives. All the supernatural states of the saints are as a ray of the glory of Tabor. And by the magnificence of this dawning of the future glory of Jesus, we can better comprehend the immensity of His sacrifice in despoiling Himself of it and taking *the form of a servant*. The glory of Jesus on Tabor so impressed St. Peter that he considered it one of the strongest proofs of His divinity. This he shows in his second Epistle when he says, *For he received from God*

*the Father honor and glory, when from out the majestic glory a voice came down to him, speaking thus: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And this voice we ourselves heard borne from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mount.* But the cross was also foreshadowed in this mystery, for the conversation of Jesus with the two prophets of the Old Law was on the subject of *his death, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.* The more we learn to know Jesus, the more we enter into the mystery of the cross; but before imposing the burden, He gives us strength to carry it. This truth should not only reconcile us with the cross, but also enable us to carry it with courage and joy.

"O God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, keep us outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may hurt the soul" (Roman Missal).

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SEPTEMBER 3

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### *The Possessed Boy*



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"And one of the crowd . . . said, 'Master, I have brought to thee my son, who has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth; and he is wasting away. And I told thy disciples to cast it out; but they could not'" (Mk. 9:16, 17).

When Jesus with the three witnesses of the Transfiguration came to join the other Apostles, He found them surrounded by a

large crowd and disputing with the Scribes. The crowd ran to greet Jesus and one of them begged Him to drive the devil out of his child.

Divine Master, help me to understand more clearly the importance of both mortification and prayer for my advancement in the spiritual life.

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When our Savior appeared on the scene, the crowd showed surprise and, according to St. Mark, they were *struck with fear*. Perhaps Jesus still retained some visible traces of the glory and majesty of the Transfiguration, or it may be that the spectators of the dispute between the Apostles and the Scribes had been taking a lively part in the argument on the side of the Scribes. Jesus asked, "*What are you arguing about among yourselves?*" Here a man in the crowd called out to Jesus that he had brought to Him his son who was possessed by a devil, and that the efforts of the Apostles to perform the exorcism had failed. The circumstances were not favorable to our Savior. He had given His Apostles the power to cast out devils and now they were discouraged and publicly humiliated because of their embarrassing failure. So recently the glories of Tabor, and now the difficulties of life! Our Savior's rebuke, "*O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?*" was addressed in some measure to all present, but especially to His disciples, disheartened by their first defeat, and to the father of the boy, who lacked faith and confidence as he showed later in the words, "*But if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*"

In order to increase the faith of the possessed boy's father and also to intensify his desire for his son's cure, our Savior permitted the devil to show his power over the child's body



as well as his fear and rage at the divine Presence. *And the spirit*, continues St. Mark, *when it saw Jesus, immediately threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell down on the ground, and rolled about foaming at the mouth.* Then Jesus inquired as to the details of the boy's malady and possession, for organic disease seems also to have been present in this case. The sympathy of our Savior won the child's father and prayer for a cure rose instantly to his lips. His words revealed a faith so imperfect, however, that Jesus told him explicitly that all depended upon his faith: "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*" Then the anxious father cried out weeping, "*I do believe; help my unbelief.*"

This humble cry, asking not only for the cure but also for faith, was sufficient. Jesus commanded the evil spirit, "*Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee, go out of him and enter him no more.*" The boy uttered a loud shriek, twisted convulsively, and then lay still in so deathlike a manner that many thought he had really expired; but Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up and restored him to his father. But there still remained a lesson to be given the Apostles. They themselves asked Jesus for instruction quite humbly and simply when He had entered the house: "*Why could not we cast it out?*" "*Because of your little faith,*" answered our Savior; "*for amen I say to you, if you have faith like a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Remove from here'; and it will remove.*" And he added, "*But this kind can only be cast out by prayer and fasting.*"

Men of faith, men of prayer, men of self-denial have all power!

It is not difficult, my Jesus, for me to find the reason for my own spiritual powerlessness—I who pray so distractedly and mortify myself so seldom. Help me to find in prayer and self-conquest the secret of invincible strength against the powers of evil.

*Second Prediction of the Passion*



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“But while all were marvelling at all the things that he was doing, he said to his disciples, ‘Store up these words in your minds: the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of men.’ But they did not understand this saying” (Lk. 9:44, 45).

This second prediction of the passion was made during the last days of our Savior’s Galilean apostolate and at a time when there was still great enthusiasm over the miraculous cure of the possessed child.

Lord Jesus, teach me how to meditate upon Your sacred passion.

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Again our Savior chose a period of His glory to speak directly of His passion. The first prediction had been made following St. Peter’s great confession of faith, and now at a time of general enthusiasm over the wonderful works of Jesus, He warned the Apostles to bear in mind His approaching humiliation. This second prediction was not as specific as the first had been, but in both instances our Savior had revealed just enough to convey the desired impression and to establish the fact that He would suffer voluntarily and with foreknowledge. According to St. Matthew Jesus on this occasion again foretold His death and resurrection, but with an added circumstance, that of the betrayal; yet He did not name the traitor. “*The Son of Man,*” He said, “*is to be betrayed into the hands of men.*” What infinite sadness in this contrast! The Son of Man, the glory and crown of the human race, will be put to death by the very men He came to save. This second prediction was especially grave

and formal: "*Store up these words in your minds,*" Jesus warned His own. Apparently, His intention in repeating the revelation was to accustom the minds of the Apostles more and more to the idea of a suffering Messiah. How admirable is the goodness and humility of our Savior in thus allowing us a glimpse of the sentiments of His divine heart where the shadow of the cross was ever extending, growing always sharper and more real, but only because He deigned to permit this and only in the measure that He permitted it.

The manner in which the Apostles received this renewed prophecy is highly instructive. First, St. Luke tells us that they did not comprehend the meaning of our Savior's words. A suffering Messiah, a Savior who would die a violent and ignominious death, was an idea still quite beyond their range of conception; and Jesus did not pursue the matter further at this time, for truth prematurely disclosed in full can do harm. St. Matthew remarks that they became very sad, as men naturally do upon hearing that a misfortune is to befall someone dear to them. But, despite their sadness and perplexity, both St. Mark and St. Luke tell us that the Apostles did not dare to ask for an explanation. Perhaps they were afraid of learning something even more depressing. It may be also that they thought the Master's words had as on other occasions some mysterious, perhaps figurative, meaning which the future would reveal. In any case, the words "suffering" and "death" had for the Apostles a quite different connotation than for our Savior, both because of their erroneous notions about the Messiah and because of their natural human repugnance for pain.

My Jesus, in the Apostles I see only too clearly my own purely natural thoughts and attitudes in the anticipation of suffering and the cross. In You I behold and adore the sentiments

that grace imparts. The thought of Your passion was constantly with You; You spoke of it without fear and when Your *hour* came, You went to meet suffering and death courageously. Take me, O divine Master, into the school of Your Heart that I may learn to be, like You, a friend, a lover of the cross.

SEPTEMBER 5

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### *The Temple Tax*



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“And when they had come to Capharnaum, those who were collecting the didrachma came to Peter and said, ‘Does your Master not pay the didrachma?’ He said, ‘Yes’” (Mt. 17:23).

Upon the return of Jesus to Capharnaum, the collectors of the Temple tax approached St. Peter. Every Israelite over twenty years of age was expected to pay an annual tax of a half shekel for the upkeep of the sanctuary.

Divine Master, let not Your infinite condescension in giving Yourself to me so generously cause me to forget who You are and who I am.

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The tax collectors accosted Peter instead of going directly to his Master, either out of respect for Jesus (the tactfulness of their inquiry is noteworthy) or because the house where Jesus was staying belonged to Peter. As usual, Peter replied immediately, without reflection or qualification. He wished it to be understood that of course his Master paid the tax like all pious Israelites. Peter had not yet drawn the necessary practical conclusions from his acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God. When he entered the house, however,

either to get the money or to inform our Savior of the matter, Jesus anticipated him, putting to him in the form of a parable a question which was meant to show Peter that as the Son of God He was not obliged to pay the Temple tax. "*What dost thou think, Simon?*" asked Jesus. "*From whom do the kings of the earth receive tribute or customs; from their own sons, or from others?*" The answer was obvious. "*From others,*" answered Peter. "*The sons then,*" said Jesus, "*are exempt.*"

If God, the Ruler of Israel, had authorized a tax for the upkeep of His worship, His Son was under no obligation of contributing toward it. If, for reasons of charity and discretion, however, Jesus submitted to this law, Peter was to understand that this was done without detriment to His right of immunity; an immunity which Peter himself had implicitly recognized when he openly acclaimed his Master as the Son of the living God. But, so that no offense might be given, Peter was sent to cast a hook into the sea and in the mouth of the first fish he caught was found a stater or shekel, enough to pay the tax for both.

We have here more than one remarkable feature to consider in the conduct of our Savior. He who might have had all the treasures of the world for His own possessed nothing, not even a half shekel. Moreover, His omniscience is revealed in the fact that when Peter entered the house after he was accosted by the tax collectors, Jesus *spoke first*, as St. Matthew significantly observes, showing thus that He was aware of the conversation regarding the tribute. Again, He either created a shekel in the mouth of the first fish caught by St. Peter or by His omniscience knew of its presence there. And not only did this miracle manifest the power and dignity of Jesus as the Son of God, but His words also, in

which He mildly and sweetly reproved the impetuosity of Peter, who had for the moment lost sight of this truth. The purpose of the miracle was to strengthen Peter in his faith in the divinity of Jesus and to prompt him to make a practical application of this faith to his thoughts, judgments, and actions.

Divine Savior, I adore all Your divine perfections and especially the power, goodness, and divine condescension You manifested on this occasion. Like St. Peter, I too need to remember in a more practical way that I live under the same roof with You, the very Son of God, and that daily You are my Food and my constant Companion. Make this realization so vivid for me, good Jesus, that it will decisively influence my thoughts, judgments, and actions.

SEPTEMBER 6

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### *The Apostles' Secret Ambition Reproved*



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“Now a discussion arose among them, which of them was the greatest” (Lk. 9:46).

During one of their walks to Capharnaum the Apostles fell into a spirited dispute among themselves over the question of precedence in the kingdom of God.

Divine Master, free my heart from all ambition except that of becoming a perfect follower of Yours.

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The cause of this dispute was, perhaps, our Savior's prediction of the Resurrection and His allusions to His kingdom; or, perhaps, the privileges given the favored Three and espe-

cially to Peter had aroused a spirit of rivalry and even envy in the others. It appears that the discussion was a lively one, and that our Savior was at the time walking some distance apart from the Apostles, engaged, perhaps, in private prayer or recollection. When they reached the house (possibly St. Peter's or a dwelling placed at the service of his Master by St. Matthew), Jesus asked the Twelve, "*What were you arguing about on the way?*" At first there was silence and then, to save themselves from personal embarrassment, they gave Him the general subject of their debate: "*Who . . . is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*" Jesus was well aware that His question would embarrass His Apostles, because they knew their Master well enough to realize that ambition was displeasing to Him; yet they had not been able to resist the temptation to enter into a useless and absurd argument over their relative merits.

Then Jesus sat down and gathering the Twelve together taught them a lesson. Let us observe here especially the zeal of our Savior in the formation of His Apostles. Nothing escaped His notice; and while the reprimand they so richly deserved was administered with all sweetness and goodness, the condemnation of ambition which it conveyed was striking and unmistakable. Jesus called to Him a little child and embracing it He placed it in the midst of the group and said, "*Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever, therefore, humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" Here, then, was a goal for the Twelve worthy of their striving. Did they desire to be first? Then let each one endeavor to be the least, sincerely and from his heart. Only so and by making himself the servant of all does a man fit himself to rule others

for their good; for on another and similar occasion Jesus had said, "*Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; even as the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

How forcefully this incident teaches us to guard with vigilant care against yielding to temptations to ambition, since we find this weakness even among the companions of our Savior! We learn from it also the desirableness of childlike humility and simplicity; for on this occasion the humility of a child symbolized the humility of Christ; thus it becomes truly sublime, a reflection of the divine filiation and of the purity and sanctity of God.

In humility of heart, then, O Jesus, is the true principle of union with You. This means death to my egoism; and egoism is strong within me. Show me clearly, dear Lord, how I fail in candor and guilelessness; grant me to desire and really to advance in the humility that You embraced and honored in that privileged little child.

SEPTEMBER 7

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### *A Lesson in Tolerance*



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"But John answered and said, 'Master, we saw a man casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us'" (Lk. 9:49).

Profiting by the silence that doubtless followed our Savior's reprimand, St. John addressed another question to the Master: Might others not associated with the apostolic college cast out



devils in the name of Jesus? They had found a man doing this and had protested against it.

Lord Jesus, let my temptations to envy lead me to greater self-knowledge and humility.

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Several motives might have prompted the question asked on this occasion by St. John. The Apostles were embarrassed at having their ambitious designs discovered by the Master, and so St. John gladly relieved the situation by changing the subject. Perhaps, also, the preceding words of Jesus: "*Whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me*" and the phrase *for my sake* in the words, "*Whoever receives this little child for my sake receives me,*" had suggested to John the thought that in order to receive Jesus it was necessary to be attached to Him by external association as the Apostles were. It would follow, then, that only members of the apostolic college might perform miracles in the name of Jesus.

By his question St. John appears to have assumed also that the exercise of miraculous powers was essential to the apostleship. It is true that our Savior had conferred such powers upon the Apostles, but as a gift of supererogation, in no way essential. Besides, St. John wrongly supposed that the power to cast out devils was an exclusive prerogative of the Apostles, and that the name of Jesus should have efficacy only in their mouths. It was with this thought, namely, that they were safeguarding their own privilege and their Master's honor, that the Apostles had forbidden a man whom they found casting out devils to appropriate the name of Jesus. More subtle and personal motives behind their question may have been a certain narrowness and peevishness and, perhaps, a touch of jealousy.

Our Savior, first of all, expressly disapproved of the conduct of the Apostles; they had acted wrongly. "*Do not forbid him,*" He said. Then He gave two reasons for His prohibition. The first concerned Himself personally. Whoever works a miracle in the name of Jesus clearly believes in Him and, therefore, is in a manner attached to Him. Such a person, therefore, is not against Him and will not speak ill of Him, even though he is not a member of the apostolic college. Moreover, Jesus is greatly glorified when many are favored with the gifts of grace in His name and by His power. The second reason had to do with the Apostles themselves: "*For he who is not against you is for you.*" The fact that an individual was not one of the Twelve did not make him an enemy. This man who had been chided by the Apostles might well have been kindly disposed toward them, and our Savior developed this point by the promise of a heavenly recompense for the least kind action done to the Apostles. Thus He comforted His own whom He had been reproving by showing them how dear they were to Him and how He preferred them to all others, even when He was pleased to communicate the gifts of grace to someone not of their number. "*For whoever gives you a cup of cold water to drink in my name,*" He told them, "*because you are Christ's, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.*"

Divine Master, You teach me in this mystery how envy can find entrance even among the most spiritual persons, and how I must guard against this vice. Perhaps I am not entirely free from a certain pettiness and narrowness of heart. This may often be the source of my aversions or my displeasure with my neighbor, as it certainly is the cause of feelings of satisfaction at a neighbor's misfortune or of sadness at his success, especially when it seems to put me in the shade. Enable me,

O good Jesus, to banish instantly from my heart all sentiments of this sort, so contrary to Your spirit and so directly opposed to Your example. Make me rejoice sincerely with all who are able to accomplish some good in Your name.

SEPTEMBER 8

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*The Nativity of Our Lady*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 840)

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SEPTEMBER 9

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*The Sin of Scandal*



“And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him if a great millstone were hung about his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (Mk. 9:41). After teaching the Apostles by way of answering St. John’s question concerning the exorcist, that the name of Jesus forms a common bond among those who invoke it, our Savior returned to His thought about children and the help that is to be given them for His name’s sake.

O Jesus, help me to appreciate the enormity of the sin of scandal.

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Jesus had begun by speaking of the recompense promised for benefactions to His little ones; but now it is not so much children in the literal sense, but His disciples to whom He refers. They are the *little ones who believe*; and cor-

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responding to the obligation of coming to their aid is the sacred duty of not scandalizing them. Scandal is any word or action whereby one becomes for others an occasion of sin. To *receive* one of these *little ones*, on the other hand, is to do good to him, particularly good in the spiritual order. In His warning Jesus refers not only to the possibility of scandal, but to its reality. Scandal exists; the world being what it is, scandal will inevitably be given. *"For it must needs be that scandals come,"* said our Savior, *"but woe to the man through whom scandal does come!"* Yet, the inevitability of this evil does not lessen in any degree the seriousness of it, nor the responsibility of the one who gives the scandal. *"It were better for him,"* Jesus tells us, *"if a great millstone were hung about his neck and he were thrown into the sea."* The penalty of drowning was especially terrifying to all ancient peoples, because of their emphasis upon decent burial. But serious and shameful as it was, the penalty was a lesser evil than the sin of scandal, which has the direst consequences for him who gives and him who receives.

As to the corresponding obligation of avoiding the receiving of scandal, our Savior speaks in equally grave terms of the sacrifices to which we should consent rather than expose ourselves to this evil. The hand, the foot, the eye — an increasingly costly renunciation must be made, if necessary. Thus does Jesus typify the firm determination that should be ours to sacrifice everything most dear and even necessary rather than allow these things to lead us into sin. The greatest sacrifices are as nothing when the alternatives are life or Gehenna. The things that might need to be cut off from ourselves are too varied to enumerate, and the individual application of our Savior's imagery here depends upon circumstances; but there is no indefiniteness about the manner in which the

alternatives are presented. We shall either live with the life of God or suffer hell-fire; it is noteworthy that in this short passage on the wickedness of scandal, there are two references to hell-fire in the version of St. Matthew and three in the parallel version of St. Mark.

Divine Savior, help me to measure all things with an unblurred and undimmed vision in their bearing upon my final destiny. Enable me to come joyfully and freely to You, stripped of all that could place even a hair as fine as the spirit between us. And let not my own weakness ever be the cause of another's fall; let me not ever *put a stumbling block or a hindrance in [my] brother's way, the brother for whom Christ died.*

SEPTEMBER 10

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### *The Unmerciful Servant*



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"So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if you do not each forgive your brothers from your hearts" (Mt. 18:35).

These words of our Savior indicate the lesson He wishes us to learn from His parable of the king and the pardoned debtor who becomes a pitiless creditor. The parable itself was delivered in response to Peter's question as to how many times he should forgive one who had offended him.

Divine Master, grant me a deeper realization of my debt to You, that I may more wholeheartedly forgive my neighbor.

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The question of Peter was probably suggested by what the Master had just said concerning the power granted to the Apostles of binding and loosing. Peter, however, wished to

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know how often he was to forgive personal affronts. Our Savior replied that pardon must be granted not seven times, which Peter seemed to regard as surely the ultimate number, but *seventy times seven*, that is, an indeterminate number or, in one word, always. Forgiveness of wrongs done us personally must be inexhaustible, without limit. Then our Savior added a parable whose purpose was to exhort us all to treat one another with the same generosity that our heavenly Father has shown us. The reasons for this are indicated in the parable. The first is the image given therein of the scope of the divine generosity. The extent of God's mercy is figuratively represented by the enormity of the debt that was forgiven the king's servant. Ten thousand talents would represent the revenue of an entire province, a crushing, insoluble debt, equivalent to more than twelve million dollars. The king does not cancel it only in part, however, but totally, in answer to merely the request, without demanding any of the penalties which oriental potentates might impose at will upon the goods and person of their subjects.

The second incentive to generosity toward our brethren is presented to us in the unworthy conduct of the servant who was thus pardoned toward his fellow servant and the punishment his behavior brought upon him. He immediately forgot the favor he had received and showed a severity and rigor which, strictly speaking, he had a right to show, but which, under the circumstances was a most inhumane act; for he arrested and abused his own debtor in spite of the humble entreaties of the latter. Furthermore, the debt itself of one hundred denarii, or about twenty dollars, was negligible in comparison with the other, and in this case it could and probably would have been paid. Even the other servants were saddened and indignant at this severity, and they

reported it to the king, who in just anger handed over the hardhearted servant to the torturers until he should pay all that he formerly owed. There was small chance of this, however, so that the sentence was equivalent to lifelong imprisonment.

We condemn the conduct of the pitiless servant, but how often we also are guilty of it! We who serve God so badly are often pitiless toward those who are remiss toward us. We who fail our divine Master so many times are unwilling to pardon the shortcomings of others. It is not always a want of mortification that retards our spiritual progress, but the selfishness and stiffness we show toward our neighbor. Let us consider whether we may not have closed off certain avenues of grace by shutting ourselves off from the needs of our brethren. It is only on condition that we become sensible of our neighbor's wants that God lets Himself be touched by our own.

My God, You are my Father, my Master, and my Judge. You have commanded me to forgive those who have injured me, as I hope for forgiveness from You for my own sins. You have said that what I do to the least of my brethren I do to You. Even if my brother does not deserve my pardon, You deserve it, and it is You whom I honor in forgiving my neighbor.

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SEPTEMBER 11

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*Purgatory*



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“And his master, being angry, handed him over to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him” (Mt. 18:34).

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This portion of our Savior's parable of the king and the debtors recalls to our minds the doctrine of purgatory.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace more and more to hate and avoid deliberate venial sin.

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What is the nature of the sufferings of purgatory? The Office of the Dead expresses the thought of the Church concerning these pains. It speaks of anguish, darkness, exile from heaven, and fire; it asks for the suffering soul eternal rest, perpetual light, deliverance, and refreshment. The chastisements which have been enumerated are, then, those which according to the liturgy of the Church divine Justice decrees for the expiation of the least fault, the least remains of mortal sin, forgiven as to guilt, but not remitted as to punishment. There are two objectives in these penalties: atonement to the divine Majesty and restoration of perfect stainlessness to our souls. Here again the divine Mercy does not demand of us an exactly proportioned expiation; the souls in purgatory are punished less severely than they deserve.

The rehabilitation of our souls, too, is a long process by its very nature. Sin can be committed in the flash of an instant, as it can also be instantly forgiven—at the moment when the will submits to God in love; but the wound inflicted upon the soul by sin is slow in healing. In a moment we may efficaciously resolve to correct a bad habit, but years of struggle may be needed before our will can easily assert its dominion over the appetite we allowed to become inordinate. At death a soul may be possessed of that charity of God which is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, but inordinate attraction to creatures may also be present along with bad habits which



have been formed by small sins repeatedly committed and not as yet rooted out. The soul that dies in this state goes to purgatory until full satisfaction is made and complete purity attained.

This suffering in purgatory will be unrewarded, however, for the time of meriting will have passed; but it will be a willed suffering. With its whole being the soul in purgatory chooses to suffer, and yet the very essence of its suffering is that the soul is hindered from that which it most desires and chooses: immediate union with God. Only God knows when and how far these sufferings can be substituted for by the intercession of the Church on earth for the soul. But revelation at least assures us that we can effectively help the Poor Souls. In the Church from the very beginning the practice has obtained of praying for the dead and offering Holy Mass for them. In uniting with the Church in this intention we fulfill a duty not only of justice but of charity for our brethren in the Church suffering. We also promote the spread of the kingdom of God, for the object of our prayer is that these souls may be delivered from purgatory to praise God forever in heaven. Moreover, in praying for the dead we serve ourselves; for one day we also shall need the charitable prayers of our brethren, and St. Augustine says that the prayers and Masses offered on earth benefit only those who on earth earned that they should be benefited by them.

O merciful Jesus, in union with the Church, I beg Your un-failing mercy for the holy souls in purgatory. Through the most pure hands of Your blessed Mother I offer my prayers, mortifications, works, and especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that they all, but especially the dear deceased of the Congregation of Holy Cross, may have light perpetual, the

company of the saints, and eternal repose in Your love. Grant me, good Jesus, a continual and charitable remembrance of the dead and grace to avoid all deliberate consent to whatever would hinder my union with You, not so much out of dread of the punishments of purgatory as from hatred of sin because it offends You, my Jesus.

SEPTEMBER 12

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*The Holy Name of Mary*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 843)

SEPTEMBER 13

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*Departure of Our Savior From Galilee*



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“Now it came to pass, when the days had come for him to be taken up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51).

St. Luke places great emphasis upon the final departure of Jesus from Galilee. It was a decisive moment, for this journey of our Savior to Jerusalem was to lead, within a few months, to His passion and death.

Lord Jesus, fill me with Your spirit of fortitude.

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Our Savior's departure for Jerusalem on this occasion marked the end of His apostolate in Galilee, and it was as

a signal for real and open attack against Him on the part of His enemies. Approximately six months later this struggle was to end in Jesus' death, and Jerusalem was to play a special role in that event, as our Savior had foretold. The storm was already gathering and danger was so near and real that Jesus did not judge it prudent to return publicly to Jerusalem, nor to let the time of His arrival there be known. Yet, firmly and with unalterable determination, *he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem*, that He might both advance His immutable designs and offer this beloved city the opportunity of salvation once again. The intrepid courage of our Savior in spite of His foreknowledge of what awaited Him in the Holy City teaches us particularly a lesson in holy fortitude. What energy and forcefulness of action are implied in the words of St. Luke! How instructive it is to reflect upon this divine example of vigor and intrepidity in the light of our Savior's reproof of the imprudent zeal of His Apostles shown on the same occasion!

The shortest route to Jerusalem was through Samaria and it was Jesus' intention to ask for hospitality there. But His messengers (perhaps James and John) were rudely received by the Samaritans and their request for lodging was refused, *because his face was set for Jerusalem*. Ordinarily, the Samaritans allowed free passage, but at the approach of their great feasts, which sometimes coincided with the feasts of the Jews, their fanatical hostility was likely to flare up, and they became especially sensitive to the presence of pilgrims from Galilee on their way to worship in Jerusalem. They regarded this as an implied insult to their temple on Mount Garizim, which they considered the only legitimate place for the worship of God. James and John, the *sons of thunder*, found such a violation of the laws of hospitality

intolerable, and they appealed to the Master: "*Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?*"

This request of James and John was surely prompted mainly by their love and reverence for Jesus and their zeal for His glory; but it was a somewhat thoughtless zeal that would propose using the gifts which had been conferred for the edification of others to bring about their destruction. In the inexhaustible gentleness of His heart, our Savior checked their indignation. *But he turned and rebuked them*, writes St. Luke, *saying, "You do not know of what manner of spirit you are; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."* Then, patiently, sweetly, He went to look for another place of shelter. How magnificently does the answer of Jesus to His Apostles reveal His merciful charity and zeal for souls, and how clearly He taught them that the powers they had received were not to be exercised in their own interest!

Help me, divine and merciful Savior, to imitate Your selfless zeal. The will of the Father and His interests alone directed all Your actions, interior and exterior, while I am so often motivated, as were the sons of thunder, by an ill-directed zeal. Even in the little good that I am able to do by Your grace there is so much of self-will and self-interest. Grant me the grace to act habitually with purity of intention, so that I may clearly know when to be energetic and fearless and when to practice docile submission.

SEPTEMBER 14

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*The Exaltation of the Holy Cross*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 845)

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SEPTEMBER 15

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*The Sorrows of Our Lady*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 848)

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SEPTEMBER 16

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*Evangelical Poverty*



“And it came to pass as they went on their journey, that a man said to him, ‘I will follow thee wherever thou goest.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’” (Lk. 9:57, 58).

This aspirant is one of three encountered by our Lord in His journey to Jerusalem. By way of reply Jesus invited him to sound the depths of his own soul, to estimate, as it were, his capacity for self-renunciation.

Lord Jesus, show me clearly my real interior dispositions regarding evangelical poverty.

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This man who accosted our Lord on His journey is identified by St. Matthew as a Scribe. This circumstance, however, does not imply that he was lacking in sincerity or disinterestedness in his application for admission among the disciples of Jesus. The offer was unreserved: "*I will follow thee wherever thou goest.*" His words seem to breathe firm determination, respect, and admiration for our Savior. But what were the interior motives of this applicant? Was there some admixture of material considerations? The answer of Jesus would seem to suggest this; for while His words were not meant to discourage, they appear to have been intended as a test of the fitness of this man for the apostolic life. The indispensable condition is presented to him squarely: that is to say, poverty, and not only interior poverty or poverty of the spirit, but also external and sensible privation, poverty in material goods to an extreme degree, as Jesus Himself practiced it. This meaning is strikingly conveyed by our Savior's comparison of His poverty with that of animals, who, in general, suffer greater privation than do men. And among the animals themselves, wild beasts and the birds of the air are poorer than the domestic animals, who are cared for by men. And so the poverty of Jesus was greater than that of the poorest among the animals: "*The foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*"

It was truly so! Driven from Nazareth, ignored in Galilee, refused lodging in Samaria, threatened with death in Jerusalem, there was for our Savior no settled abode which He could call His own, nor did He have even the certainty of daily food. He received the very necessities of life as alms of another's charity. Here was poverty indeed, and a particularly moving and impressive poverty when we think of

what our Savior might have had. Yet herein precisely lies the full majesty and grandeur of poverty: that He, the Incarnate God, chose voluntarily to lead a life so poor, poor even to the point of destitution. It was for love of us that He made this choice, so that through His precept and example we might be enriched with knowledge of the true nature and value of material wealth and material poverty. Such, then, is the primary condition of discipleship. If this Scribe was pursuing material interests, his resolve to follow Jesus received a severe shock. If, on the other hand, his motives were supernatural, this very poverty placed before him so sharply and truthfully should have presented a very powerful attraction. We are not informed, however, whether the enthusiasm of this would-be disciple survived the test of his motives and his courage represented by the reply of our Savior.

Divine Savior, when, even without going beyond the limits and spirit of the Rule, shall I begin to imitate Your poverty? At least, keep my eyes fixed on You, my divine Model, and my mind filled with the meaning of Your cross and sufferings. Teach me, good Jesus, how sweet it is to love and practice the poverty and penance of a Master who in infancy was laid on straw, who had nowhere to lay His head during His preaching journeys, and who at the last died on the cross.

SEPTEMBER 17

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### *Necessity of Prompt Obedience*



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“And he said to another, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father’” (Lk. 9:59).

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In the course of the same journey to Jerusalem our Savior encountered a second man who was called to the apostolic life, but this time Jesus Himself anticipated the petition by a summons: *"Follow me."*

Divine Savior, help me to apply in my daily life Your instruction on this occasion.

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In this second case of a call to the apostolic vocation, Jesus Himself issued the formal summons. In the parallel text of St. Matthew we read: *And another, who was one of his disciples, said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."* From this we may suppose that here was question of a disciple who was already among the followers of Jesus and whom He now called to a life of greater sacrifice. To this man, as before to St. Matthew, Jesus said merely, *"Follow me."* Matthew had risen from his customhouse desk and followed immediately, but in this present case, although the call was accepted, the recipient asked for a delay: *"Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

The reply of the disciple could mean, "Lord, permit me to go this very day and bury my father," since in the East the dead were ordinarily interred on the day of death; but we can hardly think that this man had left his father's bier to go to meet Jesus. Or the meaning might be, "Lord, permit me to remain with my father and care for him until his death." There was nothing unreasonable in such a request, yet it concerned a duty that could be deputed to another in a case of necessity. Our Savior's answer was positive and absolute: *"Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* We know for certain that Jesus was not indifferent to the fourth commandment, and that He was not lacking in the most delicate



consideration for the proprieties; but His reply was divinely consistent with His teaching and example regarding the principle that the service of God takes precedence over all other obligations, even the most sacred from the human standpoint.

The rights of God over us supersede the rights of all others, not excepting even our parents. And since He possesses all rights over us, our love for God should transcend all other loves and our service of Him all other duties, even those toward our parents and family. When God calls we must obey, even when our doing so would mean (although the hypothesis is most improbable) that our parents would not receive burial. It is because God calls—such is the motive for obedience implied by the words of our Savior to this disciple. His refusal to grant permission for delay shows us the sublimity of the apostolic vocation and its opposition to the life of the world: "*Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*" In comparison with the works of the spiritual life, the affairs of this present life are a sort of death. To embrace the apostolic vocation is to follow Jesus, to attach oneself to Him, and to minister to souls after His example. Someone else might have performed for this disciple called to a closer following of Jesus the service which people of the world willingly perform for one another; but no one could take his place in the work of preaching the kingdom of God.

My sovereign Lord, I acknowledge Your supreme rights over me and over all that is mine. I subject myself entirely to Your dominion. Help me by Your grace to struggle victoriously against my pride, my spirit of independence, my attachment to my own views, tastes, and will. Increase daily, O good

Jesus, my faith in Your supreme, absolute, irresistible, and eternal authority over all creation and in particular over me, body and soul.

SEPTEMBER 18

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### *Supremacy of the Divine Summons*



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“And another said, ‘I will follow thee, Lord; but let me first bid farewell to those at home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Lk. 9:61, 62).

A third would-be disciple mentioned only by St. Luke met our Savior on this same journey to Jerusalem.

O Jesus, grant me the grace to obey Your will in the manner You will.

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Did this third candidate first accost our Lord or was he called like the second? The Gospel does not tell us expressly. In either case, his response to the grace of the apostolic vocation was only halfhearted. He was willing to follow Jesus, but he desired to put his affairs in order first and bid farewell to the members of his family. Here again the motive for delay was care for temporal business. The reply of Jesus called for complete detachment from all preoccupations of this sort and gave as the reason the very nature of the call to the special service of God. The instruction was presented in the form of a comparison or miniature parable, the figure being that of a field under cultivation. The plowman must keep his eyes fixed on his work and strictly attend to his

task of driving a straight furrow. If he looks back, he will leave the straight line and his work will be spoiled, for the plow will no longer sink deeply into the soil. Far more, our Savior means us to infer, is the glance backward and the undue care for temporal concerns incompatible with the tilling of the field which is the kingdom of God, whose fruits should be the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Such a vocation demands the whole man, his intelligence, his will, all his strength, and all his time. To give less is to be unfit for service in the kingdom of God.

The first requisite for the apostolic vocation is detachment from all bonds of flesh and blood and from all the goods and cares of this world. The very forcefulness with which our Savior spoke of the necessity of such renunciation proves its importance. Jesus Himself seemed to imply some distinction of value in the different virtues a disciple of His should possess. While it would appear that He spoke with mildness and a certain reserve on the question of fasting, as, for example, in the second chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, here He was positive, strict, inexorable. Such rigor is justified for intrinsic reasons. First, the detachment of which Jesus spoke is necessary in view of our obligations toward God, that we may be able to fulfill the great commandment which requires us to love Him with our whole soul and all our strength. Not anyone or anything can dispense us from this obligation or be substituted for it. Above all things God asks for our whole heart; all else is immaterial to Him. In the second place, this detachment is necessary in view of our neighbor, in order that we may be truly useful to him. For this we need the force of character that detachment imparts to us, the power of edification that is its fruit, the spirit of sacrifice that, by means of detachment,

achieves the ransom of souls. Well-regulated charity toward ourselves also requires that we obey our Savior's precept in this instruction; for by this means alone shall we taste of the sweetness and peace which are only to be obtained through the practice of self-abnegation and fidelity in the service of God.

O my Jesus, how clearly You teach me that it is absolutely necessary to follow You when You call and in the manner You designate. How many graces have I lost because of the delays in my response, which seemed to me legitimate, but which were in reality imprudent! Pardon me, O Jesus, and grant me a keen sensitiveness of soul to the least motion of Your grace and alacrity to carry out Your will with neither reluctance nor an instant's delay.

SEPTEMBER 19

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### *Return of the Seventy-Two Disciples*



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"Now the seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the devils are subject to us in thy name.' But he said to them, 'I was watching Satan fall as lightning from heaven'" (Lk. 10:17, 18).

The disciples had been sent into the places where the Savior Himself was later to go; now they return full of joy at the success of their mission.

Divine Master, grant me to merit an increase in the sweetness of spiritual joys.

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The joy and satisfaction of the disciples over their success were perfectly innocent and inspired by good motives. They said explicitly that it was in the name of Jesus that the devils had submitted to them. All the glory, therefore, is returned to the Master, who had thus revealed His power in them as well as in the Apostles; and this in so difficult a work as exorcism. Such joy after one's work has been crowned with success is natural and it serves a useful purpose in that it inspires fresh courage and zeal. Jesus Himself approved of the sentiments of gladness expressed by His disciples; and He revealed to them more fully the principle of the power to which their words *in thy name* had reference. This power was, in fact, the very power of the God-Man over Satan, deriving ultimately from the first triumph won over the rebel angels: "*I was watching Satan fall as lightning from heaven.*" These words may also be taken to refer directly to the victory which the disciples obtained over Satan by the power of Jesus. Yet, this conquest won by the disciples through the power of the Savior was connected with that first heavenly victory over the rebel angels as another stage of the same struggle.

And since the disciples, although they had gone before Jesus on this occasion, would have to carry on His work after Him, the Master gave them as a permanent gift the powers they had just used so well: "*Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you.*" But these powers did not in themselves constitute a reason for rejoicing. They had been granted for the sake of others, and of themselves they could not make their possessor either truly good or truly happy. And so our Savior invited His disciples to a higher and more perfect joy, saying, "*Rejoice*

*in this, that your names are written in heaven,"* that is, in the Book of Life, to which Scripture refers so frequently.

What a precious revelation of the Person of our Savior is offered us in this mystery! If the words "*I was watching Satan fall as lightning from heaven*" can be taken as referring in any way to the first fall of the angels, they form one of the very rare texts where Jesus speaks of His eternal life in the bosom of the Divinity. A close connection would thus be established between the fall of the angels and the mystery of the Incarnation. If, on the other hand, our Savior's words on this occasion relate to the victory won by the disciples over the demons, they convey a new and splendid image of His power. Finally, we should observe the benevolence and affectionate sympathy with which Jesus condescended to share the joy of His disciples; He did not forbid them to be glad over the success of their apostolic work; on the contrary, He added a new and more elevated motive to their joy.

My Lord and Master, I see You in this incident, as in all, full of goodness and condescension. Grant me to experience the delicious interior joy that radiated from the saints even under suffering and persecution. As You know, dear Jesus, a mere nothing suffices to make me gloomy and sad, because I so readily lose sight of those higher, nobler joys to which You raised the hearts of Your disciples. Recall to my mind the motives of holy gladness You offered to them, whenever sorrow or disappointment tempt me to sadness and dejection.

*The Favored "Little Ones"*



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"I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones" (Lk. 10:21).

In *these things* Jesus refers to the truths that are more clearly designated in the following verse, namely, that the power and dominion of Christ are equal to the Father's; that the Father alone is capable of knowing Christ, and that Christ alone is capable of knowing the Father, and is the sole revealer of the Father.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of becoming a *little one* worthy of Your divine communications.

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At the thought of the gifts bestowed upon the disciples, their joyful gratitude, and the auspicious beginning of the kingdom of God, the soul of Jesus was filled with gladness, and *in that very hour*, writes St. Luke, *he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit*. The thrill of joy experienced by our Savior on this occasion is unique in the Gospel; in overflowing gladness He praised the Father of mercies in almost the language of Mary in her *Magnificat*: "I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones," that is, to the disciples. He had failed to communicate His light to *the wise and prudent* in Galilee and to the Pharisees at Jerusalem, because they trusted in their own light, being unaware that they were blind. And so the *little ones*, the trustful and eager disciples, who indeed were also blind,

but who begged for light had been preferred to the masters in Israel.

But the disciples, filled as they were with supernatural joy, needed still to be reminded of the true nature of the grace of faith and predilection which they had received. Jesus bade them reflect well upon this: *And turning to his disciples he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I say to you, many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see and they have not seen it; and to hear what you hear, and they have not heard it."* The prophets and saintly kings of the past had been blessed in being the instruments of the Holy Spirit for divine revelation; yet their greatness consisted essentially in their burning desire to see and hear the things these *little ones* were seeing and hearing.

Since our Savior is the way which leads to the Father and to the realization of His designs for the elect, He invites all men to come to Him, to take upon themselves the yoke of His doctrine, to become His disciples, to learn of Him, especially the lesson of meekness and humility. The appeal which Jesus addressed to His disciples on this occasion is a unique exhortation from a master to his disciples: "Accept what I teach, not because I am more learned than you, but because I am meek and humble of heart." God reveals His secrets, the knowledge of Himself, to the humble. Let us join the disciples in the number of the *little ones*, placing no reliance upon our own lights, but submitting to Jesus and attaching ourselves to Him in humility and meekness. Only thus will the Father reveal His Son to us and only thus shall we find our place among the elect.

Divine Master, to whom shall I go if not to You? You are my Lord and Master, who alone can answer fully to all my aspirations and all my needs. In You alone every creature finds rest



for his soul. To You, then, I come; place Your yoke once and for all upon me, O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, and make my heart like Yours.

SEPTEMBER 21

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## *The Love of God*



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“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Lk. 10:27).

Our Savior had just proclaimed His disciples blessed because their names were written in heaven and because their humble docility had merited for them a knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. A doctor of the Law took this opportunity to question Him as to the way that leads to heaven; proving by his very question, says St. Bede, the truth of our Savior’s words to His Father, *“Thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent and didst reveal them to little ones.”*

O Holy Spirit of God, fill my soul with divine love.

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The lawyer had raised a question of practical observance, and so Jesus referred him directly to the Law: *“What is written in the Law?”* Then, as if discussing a problem of interpretation with a fellow student, He added, *“How dost thou read?”* The Scribe accepted this polite invitation to display his learning and at once quoted the Scripture: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength, and with thy whole mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”* This answer was in full accord with the mind of Jesus, and He replied approvingly, *“Thou hast answered rightly; do this and thou shalt live.”*

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*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."* Would it not be an act of infinite divine condescension if we were only permitted to love God? But He gives us a formal command to love Him; and that we might be able to obey, He gave us a heart capable of this divine love. More than this, our hearts were made for Him alone, as St. Augustine has said, and they will not be at rest until they rest in Him. Let us turn our hearts completely, then, to their Beginning, their Source, their ultimate End, to Him who first loved us. Even if we were not bound to obey the divine command, we should be obliged in all justice to return love for love. *Let us therefore love*, St. John exhorts us, *because God first loved us*. How sublime is the thought that God loves us, each individual one of us! God, an abyss of perfection and glory, loves each one of us, an abyss of imperfection and miseries. God who is all loves us who are nothing.

And not only does He command us to love Him in return, but He rewards us for obeying the command. Generous, singlehearted love of God fills the soul even on earth with ineffable peace and renders all that we do meritorious. Every sorrow borne for His love becomes sweet and light; our human limitations are supplied for and endless felicity is our reward for even the smallest action done purely, supernaturally, for the love of God. And what an inconceivably tender love is this love of God for us, which He Himself reveals in the inspired words of the prophet Isaias: *Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee; and again, As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you!* The love of God is an infinitely enduring and constant love: *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.* It is

a generous love, manifesting itself as generous love ever will, by sacrifice and benefits. The manger, Calvary, the altar! How these proclaim the charity of the Heart of God toward mankind!

O my God, when I recall Your numberless benefits to me, both those I share with all mankind and those of Your gifts that are particularly mine, I feel compelled, like Your great Apostle St. Paul, to exclude from my thoughts and my whole life all selfish interests and devote my powers of soul and body, my energies and all my activity to Your love and service. Grant that I may truly love You, and let the reward of my love be a greater capacity for love.

SEPTEMBER 22

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### *The Good Samaritan*



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“But he, wishing to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Lk. 10:29.)

The Scribe asked this question not so much, perhaps, to *justify himself* in the sense that he felt our Savior was dismissing him too easily, as to pursue the interpretation of a point that was the subject of much dispute.

O Jesus, lead me to the understanding and practice in thought, word, and deed of Your precept on universal charity.

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Our Savior answered this second query of the lawyer with the parable of the good Samaritan, and in doing so He achieved a threefold end. First, the parable made it very clear that the *neighbor* referred to in the precept of the Law must

be understood as every man, be he foreigner, or enemy, heretic or idolator. Neither personal considerations nor prejudices can excuse our failure to see in every man without exception a neighbor, nor can anything justify our refusal to treat him as such. This Jesus affirmed expressly by a very ingenious question addressed to the doctor of the Law at the end of the parable, so that he would be obliged to make the decision himself: "*Which of these three, in thy opinion, proved himself neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?*" The lawyer answered, "*He who took pity on him.*" So then, it was the Samaritan who recognized his neighbor in this stranger who professed a religion different from his own and who was an enemy of his people; moreover, he treated him as his neighbor. Then Jesus said to the lawyer, "*Go and do thou also in like manner.*" Thus, the question that was asked in the realm of theory, "*And who is my neighbor?*" is answered in the realm of fact. The noblest and truest ideas are effectual only if they are realized in actual life.

By the implications of this parable Jesus also denounced energetically the teaching and practice of the rabbinical schools. It was by a hated and despised Samaritan that the lesson was taught to a representative of the Jewish religion. Both priest and Levite were probably returning from religious service in the Temple, where they should have learned above all love and the spirit of sacrifice. But they did not show even the most elementary form of consideration, for they passed by the wounded man, apparently without even looking to see whether he was an Israelite. The reproach of Jesus is implied in His question: "*Which of these three, in thy opinion, proved himself neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?*" It should have been the priest or

Levite who showed kindness to the wounded man. He might, after all, have been a fellow citizen or even a friend; but they were too indifferent even to investigate.

Finally, we are instructed in this parable as to the manner in which we should practice charity toward our neighbor. The good Samaritan acted with compassion, alacrity, and unselfishness, grudging neither time nor trouble, concerned only with the thought that the sufferer was a man like himself. The Fathers see in the Samaritan a portrait of Jesus Himself, who came down to earth, this valley of tears and death, and found man despoiled by robbers and half dead from many wounds. There was no one to help him, for Jesus alone possessed the mercy and the power, the oil and wine, necessary for this. He dressed man's wounds and took him to a shelter erected by Himself, the Church. There man is cared for at the expense of his merciful Savior until the day of His return.

Lord Jesus, what recompense can I make to You for all the mercy and love You have shown me? I know that You desire nothing more than that I should love You in return and show mercy to my neighbor for Your sake and according to Your example. Grant me for this ample stores of wine and oil, that is, the grace for good words and works, which will comfort and strengthen others in their needs of body and soul.

*Martha and the Active Life*



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“Now it came to pass as they were on their journey, that he entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed him to her house” (Lk. 10:38).

On the way to Jerusalem our Savior stopped at a certain village (probably Bethany) where He was given hospitality by Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus.

O Jesus, preserve me from undue eagerness in performing the external works of my vocation.

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It is beautiful to think of Martha welcoming our Savior into her house with so much love and trying her utmost to give Him due honor. Martha is generally regarded as the model of the active life, for her solicitude in entertaining our Savior exemplifies some of the admirable qualities of this way of life. The exercise of certain great virtues is required of those who engage in active works; for example, they must overcome timidity and indolence and practice patience, zeal, and generosity. Their reward is also great; for that which one does to the least among the brethren of Jesus one does to Jesus Himself. Even a glass of cold water given in His name receives a heavenly recompense. But the sublime privilege of Martha was to receive our Lord in person, and care for His external needs with love and alacrity.

We find in Martha, however, certain imperfections which are not uncommon in those who lead the active life. Our Savior's answer when she requested that He bid Mary help

her was clearly a reprimand. Martha had committed the error of supposing that exterior hospitality and material service were so important that all else should yield. This is an erroneous judgment, but it is frequently encountered. Each of us is inclined to consider most important that for which he has a liking or a talent. Moreover, Martha's anxiety, it appears, was needless and excessive, for Jesus said to her, "*Thou art anxious and troubled about many things, and yet only one thing is needful.*" Martha did not wish merely to entertain our Savior fittingly; she desired a brilliant hospitality, to the extent that it was possible for her to provide it; she thought she could not do enough. Such solicitude was unnecessary, and in this case it was not good. Martha was troubled and such trouble of soul never derives from a good source.

The reprimand of Jesus was friendly, yet grave, and it is also full of instruction for us. Kindly, familiarly, He addressed Martha twice by name, but He pointed out specifically the imperfection of her conduct, saying expressly that Mary was in the right. He did not condemn Martha's external occupations in themselves, however, for they were good and lawful and a means of going to God. His rebuke was directed rather to the imperfections which only too frequently are associated with the active life, namely, too high an opinion of oneself, inordinate value attached to one's external activities, anxiety, impatience, agitation. If we observe any of these faults in ourselves, let us think Jesus is looking at each one of us and saying, "*Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things; and yet only one thing is needful.*"

Good Master, make me understand clearly Your instruction on this occasion. You do not condemn Martha for her active service

of You, for You Yourself performed the works of the active life; but You would teach me here that I must not neglect prayer for activity under the pretext of zeal or devotedness, that the one thing needful is eternal salvation, that it is achieved in the measure of my union with You, and that this union is the soul of the active life, the indispensable factor in the practice of good works.

SEPTEMBER 24

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### *Mary, the Contemplative*



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“Mary has chosen the best part, and it will not be taken away from her” (Lk. 10:42).

While Martha was occupied with the external duties of hospitality, Mary was seated at our Savior’s feet listening to His words. In her posture and absorption the masters of the spiritual life see the image of the contemplative life.

Lord Jesus, teach me to unite more fruitfully the life of active works with the interior life.

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We must suppose, first of all, that Mary was convinced her help was not needed in Martha’s hospitable ministrations to the Savior, and felt that she honored the Savior more and responded more fully to His will by remaining seated and attentive at His feet. Jesus Himself revealed to us, on Mary’s behalf, the value and excellence of the contemplative life in His reply to Martha, when He said, “*only one thing is needful.*” Mary had chosen this sufficient and needful portion, that of drawing near to Jesus and listening to the



words He spoke to her heart. All the rest, the *many things*, with which Martha was preoccupied, are only necessary according to circumstances, and they must always be accompanied by a certain degree of the interior life if they are to prosper in the true sense. Indeed, if the duties of the active life are to be accomplished at all with fidelity and perseverance under all circumstances, generosity and self-sacrifice, the fruit of prayer and the interior life, must be present and growing in the soul.

*"Mary has chosen the best part."* So great is the authority of our Savior's least word that the Church has always considered a life spent in meditation and prayer higher than one given entirely to the practice of good works. Mary had chosen intercourse with God and, therefore, God Himself as her portion; and this portion would not be taken away from her. This was true not only in the sense that the interior life and its practices would always remain Mary's portion here below, while the care of externals would be Martha's role; it was true also in the higher sense that the occupation of Mary would not be interrupted by death. Throughout eternity she was to continue in it, since eternal life is the contemplation, the blessed possession of the infinite Good which is God.

But it is our Savior Himself who has given us the example of the perfect way in the union of the active and contemplative life. We see Him passing alternately from one to the other, or rather, He took up external occupations: teaching, traveling, curing the sick, without leaving contemplation and union with God. It was from contemplation and divine love that He drew the inspiration and strength to work externally for the salvation of souls. This truth is illustrated even in this incident; for, while He praised in the most

sublime terms the contemplation of Mary, He exercised the active life in the apostolic spirit by His firm, authoritative rebuke to Martha; and this firmness and authority, in turn, supposed that liberty of spirit and holy detachment which are fostered by the interior life. It is a difficult but sublime task thus to unite the contemplative and active life; it is, indeed, true evangelical perfection, the life of our holy Mother the Church, the life of the Apostles, the life of God Himself.

O my Savior, You have called me to the sublime existence which You chose for Yourself. I am aware, however, that the superiority of a particular mode of life does not necessarily imply greater sanctity in those who adopt it. You love best those who most love You, whatever may be their state of life. Help me to imitate You in this life to which You have called me. Let the light enkindled within me by the interior life of prayer and divine love not only shine, but also give light and warmth to others, that they may glorify the Father in heaven.

SEPTEMBER 25

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### *Jesus, Fountain of Supernatural Life*



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“Now on the last, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink’”  
(Jn. 7:37).

On the most solemn day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus, taking His inspiration, perhaps, from the ceremony of the pouring of the water over the altar, teaches a lesson full of mystical significance.

Divine Savior, grant me spiritual understanding of this instruction of Yours.

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Every day during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, water drawn from the pool of Siloe was carried in procession to the Temple in a golden vessel. This water and another vessel of wine were then emptied into two conduits which led to the foot of the altar. The ceremony was one of thanksgiving for the harvest and of commemoration of the water miraculously provided the Israelites in the desert. At the same time it represented a renewed profession of faith in the Messias, whose advent would be for all a true renovation and refreshment. And so, while the water was being drawn from the pool of Siloe, the choir repeated the words of Isaias: *You shall draw waters of joy out of the savior's fountains.*

It was probably this libation ceremony which furnished our Savior, who was teaching on the Temple esplanade in the midst of a large crowd, with the occasion for His mysterious cry: "*If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink,*" and then, "*He who believes in me, as the Scripture says, 'From within him there shall flow rivers of living water.'*" By these words Jesus again attested that He Himself was the Messias. Moreover, the details of this ceremony whose meaning Jesus now referred to Himself recalled the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and this exodus itself was a figure of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and of Jesus Himself. As He was the true manna, so He was also the rock whence sprang the living water; even the fountain of Siloe, which had its source in the Temple mount, was a figure of the Messias.

Finally, our Savior declared that to believe in Him was

to receive and possess the living water. In a number of passages of Holy Scripture water represents the effusion of the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit; since water, even spring water, comes down originally from the heavens, this pure and limpid element appropriately symbolizes the gift of God. Jesus Himself possessed even now the plenitude of the Spirit, but His bestowal of the Spirit upon others was to take place only after His passion and entrance into glory through the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit, it is true, was in the world and in souls before the death and glorification of Jesus, but in a restricted manner, within certain limits. Jesus, as Savior, would be the bestower of that living water, the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit, in a new and lavish manner, and to all who believed.

O divine Savior, the Hebrews of old only poured out the water from the pool of Siloe; they did not drink it, for they possessed the living water of grace merely in figure. More blessed than they, I see the promise fulfilled and I can drink from the fountains of grace flowing from Your sacred wounds. Let their life-giving streams cleanse the stains from my soul and make it fruitful in good works, producing in me at the same time a holy thirst of the spirit to love and serve You better and to be united with You forever.

SEPTEMBER 26

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### *The Adulteress*



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“Now the Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery” (Jn. 8:3).

During the Feast of Tabernacles our Savior spent the night on Mount Olivet or at Bethany. Very early each morning, however, He came again to the Temple where He spent the day teaching the people. On this occasion His discourse was interrupted by a group of Scribes and Pharisees who dragged into His presence a woman caught in adultery.

O Jesus, teach me how to imitate Your prudence.

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The accused was either a betrothed or a married woman who had been caught in adultery. Her accusers were the Scribes and Pharisees who were also, probably, members of the religious tribunal which would try her case; for unless they had been judges as well as accusers, they would not have been empowered to place the matter in our Savior's hands. But their procedure in making the accusation was surely unusual and startling. They dragged the culprit publicly into the Temple, to the very place where Jesus was seated, engaged in teaching. They forced the woman, confused and trembling, into the midst of the listeners, so that she was directly before Jesus. It was their wish that the people witness the scene and hear the sentence; not out of zeal for law and morality, despite all their attempts to convey this impression, but out of hostility to our Savior; *in order that they might be able to accuse him*, says St. John. They would force Him to decide whether this woman should be stoned. The plot was so maliciously contrived, moreover, that the sentence would inevitably furnish the enemies of Jesus with a weapon against Him. If He released the accused, they would charge Him with contradicting the law of Moses; if He condemned her to the prescribed death by stoning, His reputation for kindness to sinners would be publicly compromised.

At first, our Savior was silent; He neither denounced the sinner nor undertook her defense. Then, leaning down, He wrote with His finger on the ground. Among the Greeks and Jews such an action was a sign that one did not wish to be implicated in some matter, or that one considered its proposal inappropriate or untoward; for, externally at least, a matter involving a capital charge did not concern our Savior. But, finally, pressed for an answer, Jesus rose and said to them, "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her.*" Then, to give the accusers time to leave quietly, He again stooped down and continued to write on the ground. One by one they went out, *beginning with the eldest.*

At length the adulteress was left alone with Jesus: "Misery and Mercy remain face to face," as St. Augustine says. Repentant and full of confidence, the woman was now, perhaps, on her knees before our Savior. To His kindly question, "*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned thee?*" She answered with deep respect, "*No one, Lord.*" By His words Jesus restored her courage and made her understand that He had rescued her from her judges, and that now He alone remained as her Judge. Yet, wishing to be her Redeemer rather than her Judge, He sent her away uncondemned and at peace. "*From now on sin no more*" were His only words of admonition. It was the sin and not the sinner He condemned, for His divine, all-merciful eyes had seen repentance in that still terror-stricken heart.

I adore You, O my Savior, in Your divine mercy and goodness, which were so great that they furnished Your enemies with a pretext for attack, so tender that they not only victoriously protected the sinner, but converted her and attracted her to virtue. Grant, O Jesus, that I may imitate Your prudence and

impart to me the Gift of Counsel, which You manifested on this occasion, that I too may escape the snares of my enemies, especially my impulsiveness in word and action.

SEPTEMBER 27

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## *Jesus, the Light of the World*



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“Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world’” (Jn. 8:12).

After the interruption caused by the entrance of the Scribes and Pharisees with the adulteress, our Savior seems to have continued His discourse; or it may be that the parts of this instruction given continuously in the Gospel of St. John were delivered on various and separate occasions.

O Jesus, lead me wholly out of my darkness into Your marvelous light.

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Our Savior’s expression, “*I am the light of the world,*” might have been suggested by the splendid ceremony of the illumination of the Temple, another feature of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the great candelabra were lit in the Women’s Court. Light or fire as well as the living water was a figure of the Messiah in the language of the prophets. These words of Jesus then constituted a new testimony, a new revelation of Himself as the Messiah, and also an affirmation of His divinity; for God alone could speak of Himself as the *light of life*, that is, by faith here below and in heaven by the Beatific Vision. In thus bearing witness to Himself Jesus said in effect: The lights enkindled for the

feast are soon extinguished, but in Me and by Me shines the true and everlasting light; here among you in the Temple is the Sun that will illuminate the whole world.

Later Jesus would reply to the query of the crowd, "*Who is this Son of Man?*" "*Yet a little while the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*" They who did not believe and so become *sons of light*, endowed with the power of discerning God's mysterious purpose in the Messias' death, would be shrouded in ever growing darkness and would, therefore, walk without knowing where they were going. St. John also was to say, *The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness grasped it not.* Are not these words illustrated by the scene we are now contemplating?

All depends upon the eye, *the lamp of the body.* "*If thy eye be sound, thy whole body will be full of light,*" said our Savior on another occasion. "*But if it be evil, thy body also will be full of darkness. Take care, therefore,*" He added, "*that the light that is in thee is not darkness.*" Jesus applied the term *eye* to our understanding especially, but also to the whole soul, which, by a metaphor, He called *body*. The whole soul is enlightened by the understanding, and it is by the interior eye of the understanding that we recognize supernatural truths. Not only must the lighted lamp of truth be placed upon the lampstand, but the eye of the spirit must be clear and healthy in order to recognize this light. Then will the whole man be enlightened and thus rendered capable of recognizing all the clarity and beauty of the heavenly light which is eternal truth. Interior darkness, on the other hand, results from malice and from ill-regulated affections and



improper dispositions of the will, which do not permit reason and grace liberty to act. The lamp is lighted; it is shining forth, but the blind see it not. The fault is not in the lamp, that is, in Jesus, the Light of the World, but in the interior blindness of men.

O Jesus, whom the Father sent as a light into the world, may Your light grow in me! Make me aware of my darkness and free me from it, the darkness of false values and worldly judgments, so that I may be fully exposed interiorly to Your divine rays.

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SEPTEMBER 28

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### *Walking in the Light*



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“God is light, and in him is no darkness. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and are not practising the truth” (1 Jn. 1:5, 6).

It is in the Gospel of St. John alone that we find recorded the declaration of Jesus that He is the Light of the World; and the ideas of light and darkness which are in general characteristic of the Gospel of St. John we find repeated in his first Epistle.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace not only to behold Your light but also to walk in it.

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The light of life which is possessed by the follower of Jesus is not a sterile, unproductive knowledge of Him; it is a living flame which melts the heart and fires the will. In the first Epistle of St. John we find almost the echo of the

words Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus: *"The light has come into the world, yet men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, that his deeds may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, for they have been performed in God."* And on another occasion, as we have seen, our Savior admonished His hearers to *walk in the light, to become sons of light*. What beautiful expressions from the lips of Jesus Himself! So to act that one does not fear the light! Our Savior said to Caiphas, *"I have spoken openly to the world . . . and in secret I have said nothing."* This is the pattern of the Christian life: to walk in the light and to have nothing within oneself that dreads the light.

Then, St. John, knowing human beings, continues: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My dear children, these things I write to you in order that you may not sin. But if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just.* The acknowledgment of sin and repentance restores to the light of justice those whose works have been the works of darkness. St. Augustine has said, "When that which you have done begins to displease you, you begin to be good. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil ones." And we shall know that we love Jesus and walk in His light when we walk even as He walked, particularly in the path of fraternal charity, the commandment which Jesus called especially His own. On this point again, St. John echoes his divine Master,

for in his first Epistle we find him identifying the light with charity for our neighbor: *He who says that he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and for him there is no stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and he does not know whither he goes; because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, scatter, I beseech You, the darkness of my mind and grant me a living faith, firm hope, and burning love. Deign to give me fellowship with You that I may not walk in darkness. Teach me to walk in Your light alone. Destroy in me the darkness of bitterness, resentment, and aversion. Enable me, O Jesus, to love my neighbor as You have loved me, and make me realize clearly and habitually that what I do to my neighbor in thought, word, or deed, I do to You. Strengthen in me that precious bond which unites the hearts of all of us in Your own Sacred Heart.

SEPTEMBER 29

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*Dedication of St. Michael, the Archangel*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 850)

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*Revelations of Divinity*




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“Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am.’ They therefore took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out from the temple” (Jn. 8:58–59).

According to the account beginning in the eighth chapter of St. John’s Gospel, our Savior appears to have had a series of encounters with the Jews between the close of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of the Dedication, in the last December of His public life. Throughout these interviews Jesus seems to have given the Jews a progressively clearer revelation of Himself; while, on their part, His enemies become progressively more hostile and malicious.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to be fearless, like You, in the defense of truth and also never to resist Your light, the action of Your grace.

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We find in the discourses of our Savior during this period three kinds of testimony relative to His divinity. First, there are the instances in which He refused an explicit declaration, because the Jews would only have misunderstood and distorted it; for example, *They therefore said to him, “Where is thy father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would then know my Father also.”* Second, there are the passages where our Savior affirms His divinity quite clearly, although in veiled terms, in speaking of His eternal generation in the bosom of the Father, as: *Jesus therefore said to them, “If God were your Father, you*

would surely love me. For from God I came forth and have come; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me"; in referring to the identity of His knowledge and activity with those of the Father, as: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that of myself I do nothing; but even as the Father has taught me, I speak these things." Finally, Jesus affirms His divinity in claiming the power to impart eternal life, as: "Amen, amen, I say to you, if anyone keep my word, he will never see death."

The third class of testimonies reveals explicitly the divinity of Jesus, as in the words which provoked the Jews to their attempt to stone Him: "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am." This most beautiful definition of God, reminding us of the words addressed centuries before to Moses, "I am who am," marks His eternity, His independence, His causality. The creature, properly speaking, does not exist, it subsists. It has a derivative, contingent, unstable life. It is, in a manner, only a phenomenon, manifesting itself in God.

The growing irritation of the Jews at the repeated testimonies of our Savior was shown in their livelier and more numerous objections and in the raillery and insults with which they received the prediction of Jesus concerning His death; for example, *Again, therefore, Jesus said to them, ". . . Where I go you cannot come."* *The Jews therefore kept saying, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I go you cannot come'?"* Their increasing hostility was also evident in the blasphemous outrage they committed in accusing Jesus in the presence of the crowd of being a Samaritan and possessed by a devil, that is, of being both wicked and mad. Then, carried out of themselves with fury at His response to their charges in which He openly flayed their national pride and

personal arrogance, and especially at His clear declaration of His divinity, *they took up stones to cast at him*. They would have stoned the Messiah in His Temple, they would have extinguished the Light of the world!

With what beauty and majesty, O Jesus, and with what marvelous grace Your divine figure stands out against this ominous background! Composed and calm, You neither fled nor yielded to this angry crowd, but You withdrew from their sight by Your divine power. Grant me this courage, O Jesus, in the defense of my faith and of all truth. And never allow me, divine Redeemer, to force You to hide Yourself from me through my resistance to the light of Your grace. For Your withdrawal would be the most terrible of chastisements, the greatest of misfortunes.

OCTOBER 1

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### *The Man Born Blind*



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“And as he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth”  
(Jn. 9:1).

After the discourse on the spiritual light which ended with an attempt on the part of some of our Savior’s adversaries to stone Him, St. John narrates the cure of the man born blind. He who knew and avowed his blindness received both physical sight and the new vision of faith; they who believed themselves enlightened remained blind.

*“Lord, that I may see!”*

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As Jesus was passing perhaps one of the Temple gates where the poor and the afflicted were accustomed to gather in the

hope of receiving an alms, He saw a man who had been born blind. Filled with compassion for this man's affliction as well as for his poverty, for St. John tells us he was a beggar, Jesus stopped and fixed His divine glance upon him. The disciples, whose sympathies also had been aroused, asked, "*Rabbi, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?*" Our Savior replied that neither the blind beggar nor his parents were responsible for his affliction, but that God had permitted it in order that His works might be made manifest. The motivation of the miracle which was now to be performed was, therefore, the revealing of the works of God. Then Jesus added another reason, which recalls the imagery of His instruction during the Feast of Tabernacles: "*I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.*" That is to say: As it is the nature of light to shine forth, so my mission, as long as I am here below, is to glorify God in revealing Him and manifesting His works. Only a short time remains for Me to live, and therefore I hasten to make My light shine by a miracle which will reveal Me as the light of the world; just as in the temple My light as Messiah and as God shone forth in My teachings.

The miracle itself was extraordinary. Rightly did the cured beggar cry out, "*Not from the beginning of the world has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*" This man had never seen the light; his blindness was complete and, humanly speaking, incurable; so apparently hopeless was his case that neither he nor his parents even thought of invoking our Savior's miraculous power. But in this instance Jesus did not wait to be asked; *he spat on the ground and made clay with the spittle, and having anointed*

the man's eyes, He told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloe. The rites occasionally used by our Savior in performing miracles are, in some instances, spiritual symbols, and it is a symbolical sense which we are to look for here. The saliva and the flowing water are, above all, an image of holy Baptism, whereby a man becomes a new spiritual being; just as our Savior may actually have created sight in this man. Again, in Baptism a man is relieved of the defilement of sin and spiritual blindness by the water which springs forth from the mount of the Church, as the pool of Siloe from the Temple mount, and which has for its source the wound in the sacred side of the Redeemer.

O Jesus, Light of the world, You gave sight to the blind man that we might know You as He who enlightens every man who comes into the world. I, too, come to You for the gift of sight. Grant me, good Jesus, that undimmed vision of the spirit which sees You in every person, in every place, in every task, in all the events of life.

OCTOBER 2

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*The Guardian Angels*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 853)



*Testimony of the Cured Blind Man*



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“They took him who had been blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath on which Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes” (Jn. 9:13, 14).

In the view of the Pharisees, Jesus had committed two violations of the Sabbath rest: by molding clay, which was regarded as servile work, and by practicing medicine, which was permitted on the Sabbath only when there was danger of death.

Divine Savior, grant me light to know the truth and courage in bearing witness to it.

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Jesus had hidden Himself and left the Temple to escape the fury of His enemies after His open revelation of His divinity, but now He cast among them, as it were, a new and flaming brand of contention by this striking miracle. A miracle produces its full effect, however, only when it does actually produce wonderment. Our Savior excellently disposed all the circumstances of this cure toward this end, and the Pharisees were able assistants; for they bore witness to the reality of the cure by their very efforts to deny and suppress it. They were apprised of the miracle by the people, who, after first assuring themselves of the identity of the cured beggar, brought him to the Pharisees. In the cross examination of the cured blind man by the Pharisees, the manner of the cure was described again, as it had been before for the crowd; and Jesus was again acknowledged as the author of it. A division now arose among the Pharisees. The more hostile stressed the fact that the cure was per-

formed on the Sabbath, but others said, "*How can a man who is a sinner work these signs?*"

Next, inquiry was made of the parents of the blind man. They had not witnessed the cure, but that their son was born blind and now had his sight restored they could not deny; yet, fearing expulsion from the synagogue, they referred the matter back to their son. The cured beggar was again summoned and pressed to admit, at least, that Jesus was a sinner; but he would only say, as if out of prudence, "*Whether he is a sinner, I do not know,*" implying by these words what he immediately asserted, namely that there was one fact of which there could be no doubt—he himself was once blind and now he saw. Finally, weary of the continued questioning, he asked with a touch of mockery, "*Would you also become his disciples?*" And to the Pharisees' answering sneer that he might keep that title for himself, since they were disciples of Moses, to whom they were certain God had spoken, whereas of Jesus' origin they had no knowledge, he replied, "*Why, herein is the marvel, that you do not know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, him he hears.*" This response was interpreted as a great piece of insolence and with a last taunt, "*Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*" they drove him out of the council room and probably out of the synagogue.

This gave the beggar the opportunity of meeting Jesus, who was looking for him, for He had *heard that they had cast him out*. Our Savior approached him and first tested him with the question: "*Dost thou believe in the Son of God?*" The beggar replied eagerly, "*Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?*" Then, very clearly and explicitly,

Jesus said, "*Thou hast both seen him, and he it is who speaks with thee.*" Rarely had our Savior shown such great condescension; and the recipient was a poor beggar, but he was sincere and upright and, therefore, a dear friend of Jesus. Seeing now with the eyes of both body and soul, he fell upon his knees and worshiped, saying, "*I believe, Lord.*"

Lord Jesus, grant me an upright heart, always and everywhere bearing witness to the truth. Let not the fear of earthly loss or the hope of earthly gain ever cause me to depart from Your law. Before Your light, O Jesus, the blind see and those who think they see remain blind. You are the light that enlightens men of good will, but Your light only dazzles the proud and blinds them the more. The Pharisees refused to admit their sin and so they could not be forgiven. Preserve me, good Jesus, from ever falling into such a state of blindness.

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OCTOBER 4

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### *The Good Shepherd*



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"I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11).

The beautiful and moving parable of the good shepherd, which is linked with the miraculous cure of the man born blind, is our Savior's answer to the attacks and the malice of the Pharisees.

O Good Shepherd, I ask the grace of remaining always among Your faithful sheep and of being myself a worthy shepherd of the souls in my charge.

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Not content with persisting in their own stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus, the Pharisees had dared to threaten His

followers with exclusion from the synagogue. And now, angered by his courageous profession of faith, they had just driven out the blind man cured by our Lord. It was against the Pharisees as evil shepherds, as falsely arrogating to themselves the pastoral authority, that this parable is directed. A good shepherd, Jesus tells them, knows his sheep and goes before them as their leader; and when danger threatens he even risks his life in their defense. Then our Savior applied to Himself these characteristics of the good shepherd.

Christ the Shepherd knows His sheep and they know Him, He tells us, with a mutual knowledge, like that which exists between the Father and the Son. This very strong parallel would seem to allude to the close bond that unites Christ and the Christian in the Mystical Body. Jesus, on His side, knows us who are His sheep with the most perfect and intimate knowledge. He knows not only the viciousness of our fallen nature, but also what we can become with the help of His grace. Nothing that takes place within us is hidden from Him: thoughts, desires, affections—all are clearly visible to His eyes. The Psalmist says, *My soul also you knew full well; nor was my frame unknown to you when I was made in secret, when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my actions; in your book they are all written.* Our Lord knows the good and the evil that we do, the efforts we make to please Him, our least infidelities, our words and actions, good and bad. Yet, this knowledge Jesus has of His flock is a benevolent and merciful knowledge. From all eternity He has regarded us with the tenderness that His heavenly Father has for Him. Those faithful souls whom from eternity He has known as docile to the promptings of grace, He elects and chooses in time from among thousands and leads them into saving

pastures, supporting their weakness and giving them to drink of His life-giving waters. *The Lord is my shepherd*, cried David in a transport of gratitude, *I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.*

Jesus goes before us as our guide and model in the way of His commandments and counsels. All the virtues were first practiced in their perfection by Him; the keenest suffering was first borne by Him. He was the first to rise, glorious and immortal, from the tomb and ascend into heaven. There in that blessed eternity He now awaits us, He, the Way that leads us there. And Christ, the Good Shepherd, gave His life for His sheep. When He said, "*I lay down my life for my sheep,*" He was speaking of His passion and death. Our divine Shepherd has put all that is His freely at our disposal: His life, death, resurrection, glory, precious blood, merits, virtues—all are for us. How can our hearts not be entirely His! How can everything we are and do not be for Him!

O Jesus, divine Shepherd, I adore You and thank You. It is by You that the Church subsists and grows throughout the world, through all ages. Her authority, her strength, her unity come from You, her omnipotent and merciful Shepherd. It is my hope and my desire that I may remain to the end in the fold of the Church, following You closely in sickness as in health, in humiliation as in honor, in death as in life.

*The Good Sheep*



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“And mine know me” (Jn. 10:14).

Represent to yourself Jesus as the Good Shepherd leading His Sheep.

O Jesus, make me an ever more faithful and zealous member of Your flock.

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The good sheep! This is the corollary to the Good Shepherd, but how seldom we reflect upon it! We accept the Shepherd's care and His gifts without considering that in strict justice we owe Him in return the total service of every power of our being and every moment of our lives. Our Savior is all in all to us, His flock. He is the Door of the sheepfold, the Way, the Pasture, and the Shepherd; we are, therefore, essentially and intimately dependent upon Him. A characteristic of His sheep, Jesus tells us, is their knowledge of Him. We cannot know our Savior as fully and comprehensively as He knows us, but we can be always growing in the more intimate knowledge of Him; and this should be the chief preoccupation of our lives. St. Paul, learned though he was in human science, glorified only in knowing Jesus and Him crucified.

Let us ask ourselves how well we know our Good Shepherd: His precepts and His virtues, His interests and tastes. Let us see whether we are trying daily to grow in this knowledge and in the love it produces. The world does not know Jesus. The world, wholly absorbed in its own interests,

gladly studies nature and its marvels, but the Author of nature, Jesus, the Eternal Word, by whom all things were made, it forgets or ignores. He is regarded as an extraordinary person, a great philosopher, but His religion is viewed as a form of mythology and His moral teachings are rejected as too austere. It is for us, then, and the relatively small number of true and faithful Christians scattered throughout the world to devote our full energies toward knowing Jesus better and imitating Him more perfectly; so that the other sheep, who are not yet of His fold, may be brought to know and follow Him.

The faithful sheep not only know the shepherd, but they also heed his voice. Jesus speaks to us through Scripture, through the voice of our Superiors and our Rule, through spiritual conferences and spiritual reading, in the good thoughts and interior lights that are granted us, and in the remorse of conscience or the spiritual consolations He sends us. How sweet is His voice, so gladly heard and eagerly obeyed by faithful and interior souls! Let us beg the Good Shepherd to speak to us and through us to those who may be given us to instruct and sanctify. Good sheep follow their shepherd. How many generous souls have followed Jesus—into deserts and solitude, to self-denial and mortification, to apostolic labors, to persecution and humiliation, even to Calvary and the cross; but thence, at last, to heaven, where the Good Shepherd now reigns with the elect!

O beloved Shepherd, what shame, what cowardice is mine that I have not followed You with constancy and eagerness! Shall I never be really moved by Your love, nor by the examples of those who have followed You closely, nor even by the reward to which You invite me? Jesus, Good Shepherd, I attach myself henceforward to You alone; grant me the grace never again to

heed the call of strangers: the call of self-love and worldliness and pride. Let Your voice alone be my guide. Make me hear it, good Jesus, and draw me after You to the eternal fold of heaven.

OCTOBER 6

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## *Our Father, Who Art in Heaven*



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“In this manner, therefore, shall you pray, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’” (Mt. 6:9).

It may have been during the days following the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, when our Savior was staying in the environs of Jerusalem, that He gave this instruction on prayer. Tradition indicates a site on the Mount of Olives as the spot where the Lord’s Prayer was first uttered.

Father in heaven, grant me a true filial love of You.

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The title, Father, which we give to God is addressed alike to the First Person of the Trinity and to the Three, inasmuch as they share one and the same divinity, one and the same creative power. We rightly invoke God by this name, because all that is included in the concept of fatherhood belongs to God in His relation to us. He gave us existence by creation, whereby we have been placed not only in a state of absolute dependence upon Him, but we have become also His exclusive property. He watches over us by preserving our existence and He offers to us as our inheritance the kingdom of heaven. In another and higher sense also we have the right to call God Father, namely, in that He adopted us as His children in Jesus, through sanctifying grace. The name, Father, is



one of power and love, which on our side opens our hearts to sentiments of respect, submission, filial love, and confidence. How many other glorious titles we might have given God, but it was Jesus who chose for us the name, Father!

Jesus wishes us to be united not only to God our Father, but to all men, our brothers and children of a common Father. The word *our*, then, in the title of the *Pater Noster* recalls the equality of all men before God; it reminds us of the common bond which unites us to our fellow men and, consequently, admonishes us that we should love them and be concerned about them. In the name of all men, just and sinners alike, we praise God or supplicate Him or thank Him; thus the efficacy of our prayer is extended and multiplied. God receives more glory from it and we ourselves pray with greater zeal, because we pray in union with all and for all. Our Savior would dispel from our hearts all narrow egoism and exclusiveness. He would have each of us think of himself as part of a whole and pray and act as such, in imitation of Him.

In the third element in the address of the Lord's Prayer, *who art in heaven*, Jesus directs our imagination and our will toward the abode of the divine Majesty. God is everywhere present by His immensity; yet heaven is here mentioned explicitly, because it is there above all that He reveals His majesty, power, and goodness. It is there especially that He communicates Himself to His creatures by eternal beatitude, which consists essentially in seeing God face to face, in possessing Him, in knowing Him, and in loving Him. Heaven is the kingdom of joy, of glory, of ineffable power, where, as a king in his palace, God reveals the treasures of His bounty and shares them with His elect. To that glorious kingdom let us direct our thoughts and

imagination as we repeat the first words of the Lord's Prayer, that we may be filled with reverence for God as our Lord and King, as well as our Father; and that we may excite in our hearts a lively desire of attaining the goal: our heavenly fatherland, our Father's house.

Our Father, who art in heaven, I believe in You, I adore You, I hope in You, I love You. I believe that You are truly my Father and that I am really Your child. I believe that all men are my brethren and that in loving them I show my love for You. You are the all-powerful King of heaven and there You await us, Your children. Oh, give us a keen desire to come to You in Your kingdom, and grant that we may merit to be there received with a Father's embrace.

OCTOBER 7

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*The Holy Rosary of Our Lady*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 858)

OCTOBER 8

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*Hallowed Be Thy Name*



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“Hallowed be thy name” (Mt. 6:9).

In this petition we do not ask that the infinitely holy name of God, which is superior to all sanctification be *hallowed* in the sense of receiving a higher degree of holiness, but we express

our desire that all men may come to know, adore, love, obey, and so glorify God.

Lord Jesus, grant me to glorify the Father in union with that divine intention wherewith You glorified Him on earth.

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By the name of God we mean His nature, His attributes, His Person, God Himself. To *hallow* the name of God is to revere it as holy, to glorify it by our acknowledgment, and to render it homage and love. No other name deserves greater reverence, honor, and glory; for the name of God is supremely glorious: *O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth*; and awesome: *holy and awesome is his name*. It is a name worthy above all names of our praise: *From the rising to the setting of the sun is the name of the Lord to be praised*. The name of God is also lovable: *Sing praise to his name, which we love*.

To pray for the divine glory is not only a most exalted and most fitting work, but it is also a duty of justice, our first duty, from which all others derive. Yet, while it is a universal duty, obliging all men without exception, can we say that God receives this glorious and due acknowledgment everywhere and from all? When we offer this petition of the *Pater Noster* fruitfully, then we actually procure for God a good which He does not yet possess, since He waits to receive it from us. Nor can we do anything better or more salutary for our neighbor than to pray that the request of this petition be realized; for are we not asking in reality that happiness and peace may prevail in the world? And are not grandeur of soul and generosity of heart manifested when God is glorified, infinitely more than in the glorification of other men or self, to which men sink when they will not honor God? In praying thus we direct our own

personal thoughts and intentions to the very end that God proposes for Himself. We labor at the same work of glorification in which He has been engaged from all eternity, the work which He ceaselessly pursues, and that toward which all exterior creation tends. There could be no better or nobler intention.

In this respect as in all others, our prayers should always follow the order of the Lord's Prayer. Before thinking of ourselves we should think of God and pray first of all for His glory. Not that there is need of our asking Him to provide for His interests, but it is necessary that the interests of the divine glory be closer to our hearts than all other interests. When we ask God to help man to glorify Him as He deserves to be glorified, we are praying for the realization of the sole purpose of our life on this earth. This petition should also be applied to our practical conduct, so that by our words and actions, and by our support of all movements that promote the conversion of sinners, infidels, and heretics, we may bring others to honor and hallow the name of God.

O God, my Father, with Your grace, the chief desire of my heart henceforth will be Your glory, Your greatest possible glory. I shall work for this in all that I do every day and every moment of the day. Help me to hallow Your name first in myself, by consecrating all my thoughts, affections, and actions to Your glory, and by abstaining from all that could lessen the honor which is Your due; and enable me also to cause Your name to be hallowed in the lives of those who are in my care.

*Thy Kingdom Come*



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“Thy kingdom come” (Mt. 6:10).

It is not because God could be dispossessed of His sovereign dominion over all creation that we pray thus, but because the human will can reject the beneficent reign of God by opposing His laws. We implore God in this petition to bring about the interior reign of grace, a reign whose coming depends at once upon the grace of God and the free will of man.

Rule over me, Lord Jesus, to the exclusion of all other authority.

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When we pray that the kingdom of God may come, we ask that God may effectively dominate in the whole universe and we also pray, in an ultimate sense, for heaven, for our eternal beatitude. But this kingdom of heaven is to be reached only through the reign of God's grace in our souls; for heaven is the kingdom of sanctity, the kingdom of God's children; and both holiness and the adoption whereby we become the children of God have their source, for us, in divine grace. The reign of God which we hope to merit in heaven must, therefore, begin here below in time; in our hearts through sanctifying grace and by the practice of faith, hope, and charity. *For the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink*, St. Paul reminds us, *but in justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; for he who in this way serves Christ pleases God and is approved by men*. It is the reign of grace that we ask for, then, in this part of the *Pater Noster*. And, since by the expression, *the kingdom of God*, our Savior meant sometimes heaven and sometimes the

Church, we ask also in this petition that the Church may extend her reign over all mankind.

The realization of this request gives great glory to God as well as blessedness to man. God is nowhere more glorified than in the Church, in the soul that enjoys the state of grace, and in heaven, the place of His full, true reign, where He is perfectly served and perfectly loved. For men, on the other hand, the coming of God's kingdom is essential and supremely salutary. What are we or what have we without the Church, without grace, without heaven? Finally, to pray with ardor and sincerity that God may reign in all hearts is to advance toward this kingdom by the surest path and to assure ourselves of a high place there, inasmuch as such a request raises our thoughts to heaven and stimulates our desire to win it at all costs. We who are engaged in apostolic work should add to this prayer, moreover, the self-immolation of apostolic zeal; for to bring about God's temporal reign, whether in ourselves or in others, demands continual sacrifice. Let us examine whether we are making an effort to promote the coming of the kingdom for which we daily pray. Do we listen attentively to the suggestions of grace and obey when we have understood them? Does God reign over our senses, imagination, mind, passions, so that our ideas conform to His? Perhaps we shall find that, on the contrary, we become impatient and discontented when our wishes are thwarted even in small matters.

O heavenly Father, each time that I say *thy kingdom come* I wish to renounce all rights over myself. Your rights have not and cannot have limits. I desire to give You full and perfect dominion over me. In Your power and mercy, bring it about that Your grace may rule, govern, and control me entirely at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, in everything, with-

out the slightest exception. I include the whole world also in my intention when I say to You, *thy kingdom come*; to this end I implore You to make my works fruitful, insofar as they may promote the spread of the Church and the advance of Your reign over all hearts.

OCTOBER 10

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### *Thy Will Be Done*



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“Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

This petition begins the requests that have to do with the attainment of our goal; first we ask for positive goods and first in the number of these is our spiritual welfare, which is to be found in the accomplishment of the divine will.

*“Father . . . not my will but thine be done.”*

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In this petition we beg the grace of accomplishing the will of God both by our active co-operation and by our ready submission to all that He permits in our regard. The manner in which we desire to accomplish the divine will is expressed in the words, *as it is in heaven*. The angels and saints, contemplating God face to face, see the plans of divine Providence in all their wisdom and holiness. Rapt in adoration they worship this divine Providence, they submit to it in love and reverence, they carry out its designs with zeal, and their one desire is to see these designs accomplished in full. We pray, therefore, that God shall find in us no more opposition to His will than He finds in the blessed. To submit thus totally to the will of God, with the full consent of the

intelligence and the will, to execute the divine decrees with reverence, love, and joy, is to be a saint; and were this submission practiced on earth, it would constitute our perfect happiness, since right order is born of such obedience. But we fail in the perfect accomplishment of the divine will, because we do not understand that it is to our own best interests to obey it, or because we lack the necessary force. Free will is a great good for man; it is the source of our power to merit and to reach holiness, but it is also a great danger and the principle of sin. "Take away self-will," said a Father of the Church, "and hell will no longer exist."

The defect in our liberty in this world is the possibility of our abusing it and preferring our will to the divine will. The blessed in heaven have had this defect removed, and they are all the more free in being delivered from the possibility and the desire of seeking happiness in sin; for there can be no happiness except in not sinning. Now, in the accomplishment of the will of God, which is the grace we ask for in this part of the Lord's Prayer, we unite our will, so weak and defective, to the will of God, the rule of all holiness and perfection. We are one with Him and He reigns in us; there is no longer any question of sin. Thus we share in His infallibility, power, and wisdom, and He, in return, hears our prayers.

In heaven or on earth there is nothing higher nor more desirable than the will of God, the Father of the blessed and our Father, with the same claims on our obedience as on theirs. In any case, it is in vain that we would desire to resist Him. What God has decreed happens, whether our will is united to His or not. Let us, then, raise our thoughts to God and heaven, and from that height view the all-just, holy, and wise dispensations of the divine will. Let us say



now and always from the bottom of our heart: May the most just, the most high, the most lovable will of God be done, praised, and ever more exalted!

Grant me, O God, light to know Your will and love to accomplish it. Let me always and everywhere say in union with Jesus: "May Your will be done, not mine! May I do Your will in all that depends on me and submit to it in all that does not!" Bless my resolve to submit to You in everything, whatever may be the cost; and when I fail, let me sincerely repent and promptly and faithfully return to You at the first warning of Your grace. Make me content with all that happens to me, forcing the foolish reasons of my mind and the rebellious feelings of my heart to yield to my filial dependence upon You.

OCTOBER 11

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*The Motherhood of Our Lady*



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 860)

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OCTOBER 12

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*Give Us . . . Our Daily Bread*



"Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11).

The preceding petition of the Lord's Prayer had as its object spiritual good, the good of the soul; this one is directly concerned with the preservation of the life of the body.

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O my Father in heaven, help me to be more mindful of the truth that all my material blessings are the gifts of Your bounty.

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The *bread* for which we ask in the *Pater Noster* signifies all that is necessary and useful for the maintenance of our physical life, that is, food, clothing, shelter. Jesus teaches us here to ask for these means of physical well-being not only for ourselves personally, but also for all our brethren. We pray to our common Father on behalf of all His children, that they may receive that which is necessary for their life *this day*. In obedience to the counsel of our Savior on another occasion when He said, "*Do not be anxious for tomorrow,*" we ask only for today. Tomorrow and on each succeeding day we shall renew our request for necessary bread, since neither superabundance nor extreme want are ordinarily useful to us. If the whole Christian family were really united in intention and prayer, if each morning every Christian would humbly and sincerely ask *daily bread* for all other Christians, material distress in this world would be greatly lessened and, in general, life's course would pass with less pain and suffering.

On our part, we should co-operate with divine Providence not only by prayer, but also by work, and by wise management and prudent disposal of the temporal gifts we receive from God. Furthermore, that we should ask for these gifts at all does not imply that God is unaware of our needs, or that by our prayer we could or should prevail upon Him to hear us, as men come to a decision after good reasons have been laid before them. Jesus Himself has assured us: "*Your Father knows that you need all these things.*" God knows our needs better than we, and He will give us all that is for our good. We do not pray, therefore, in order to dispose

God to hear us, but to dispose ourselves to receive His favors by removing the obstacles that prevent our requests from being granted. Our prayer is, on the one hand, an avowal of our insufficiency and unworthiness and, on the other, an acknowledgment of the divine Power and Goodness.

It is God's will that we ask for everything we need by prayer, from the highest and most sublime graces to our smallest needs, from heaven and the Holy Spirit to our daily bread. Moreover, we honor Him by coming to Him with our smallest needs, for thus we show that we wish to have nothing except by His action, nothing which He has not given us. Prayer for our temporal wants also implies our recognition of the fact that all our labor would be unrewarded and futile unless it were blessed by God. If some have more than they need and others are in want, the reason is not that God has forgotten the poor. He wishes to bring together the rich and the poor in the practice of virtue—compassionate generosity on the one side and gratitude on the other. Indeed, the reason that God has placed a superabundance in the hands of the rich is that they might in His name share their goods with the needy.

Father in heaven, in the name of all Your children, my fellow Christians, I ask the grace of filial trust in You, that we may ask for our daily bread with a quiet mind and rely for tomorrow upon Your Fatherly goodness. Let our daily prayer to You, our common Father, be for us a bond of union in which we express for and with one another our continual and entire dependence upon Your goodness for all that we are and all that we possess.

OCTOBER 13

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*Our Lady of Fatima*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 863)

OCTOBER 14

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*Forgive Us . . . As We Also Forgive*



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“And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors”  
(Mt. 6:12).

In this fifth petition we ask that our sins, mortal and venial, may be forgiven and that the punishment they have merited may be remitted. Sin and the chastisement of sin constitute a real debt contracted toward divine Justice.

Lord Jesus, enable me really to forgive that I may be forgiven.

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Sin and the punishment due it are the debts for which we ask annulment in this petition. Venial sin can be remitted through this prayer, if we are repentant, and if no bad disposition of will interposes an obstacle. In the case of mortal sin, leaving out of consideration the presence of actual and perfect contrition, this prayer obtains remission only mediately, insofar as we ask the grace of conversion. Prayer can remit the temporal punishment due to sin, in part at least, because it is a satisfactory work, and here we ask specifically for this remission. In the light of the benefits that may be

gained, therefore, this petition should be made in all sincerity and seriousness, with contrition and a true purpose of amendment. Each of us on his own account can truly acknowledge himself as a sinner and fear with reason that all has not yet been pardoned, for we read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, *Of forgiveness be not overconfident, adding sin upon sin.*

But God is not a pitiless creditor. He is willing to cancel the debt we owe Him on condition of real repentance and firm purpose of amendment. Our Savior, however, has added a further condition, namely, that we shall be forgiven *as we also forgive our debtors.* We must recite this petition of the Lord's Prayer, then, after having become reconciled with those who have offended us. God places the matter of our judgment in our own hands. As we forgive, so shall we be forgiven by Him. Who of us has not offended God? Who does not need to ask pardon for his sins? And if anyone of us is uneasy with respect to that pardon, here is explicit assurance from the very lips of Jesus. If your brother has offended you and you are sincerely disposed to forgive him, if you feel no hatred nor resentment against him, if you are gladly reconciled at the first sign of regret, the first advance on his part; or better, if you yourself are disposed to make the first advance, and if these are your dispositions as often as he offends you, then you have every reason to be certain that our Savior is saying to you as He said to the paralytic of Capharnaum, "*Take courage . . . thy sins are forgiven thee.*"

Let us consider also the greatness of the favor we ask in imploring forgiveness for our own sins or those of others. Sin is the greatest obstacle, rather, the only obstacle, in the way of our achieving the goal toward which we are working. It is only because of sin, furthermore, that anything else becomes an obstacle to us, either by cutting us off completely

from our last end or keeping us from reaching the perfection for which we have been destined. Sin, then, is the greatest evil that can befall us or the human family as a whole, the only evil, the source of all unhappiness.

Lord, I am guilty in Your sight and I do not deserve Your mercy, but You have promised the forgiveness of my offenses according as I forgive others. Hoping in Your word and in Your compassion, I forgive from my heart all who have offended me and I implore Your pardon of their sins as I beg forgiveness of mine.

OCTOBER 15

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### *Lead Us Not Into Temptation*



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“And lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13).

In this petition we ask that divine Providence may never forsake us in the snare of sinful occasions which threaten our weakness from within or without.

O my God, grant that the temptations You will I should undergo may cause me to grow in humility and trust.

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*Let no man say when he is tempted, that he is tempted by God, writes St. James; for God is no tempter to evil, and he himself tempts no one. But everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion. Then when passion has conceived, it brings forth sin; but when sin has matured, it begets death. It was not God who endowed man with concupiscence; this was the work of sin. In direct-*

ing us to ask our heavenly Father, who could urge us only toward good, not to lead us into temptation, Jesus reminds us that we ourselves tend to go to meet occasions of sin; also, by the circumstances of our life we are sometimes exposed to temptation without its being our fault. We pray, therefore, that God may not let us succumb to these snares; but we do not ask to be relieved of all temptation, for temptation is a law of life on this earth and the condition of our merit. It would not even be good for us never to experience it, for we should then fall into pride and presumption, we should practice virtue with less energy and fervor and so lose immeasurable merit. Our petition, then, in the Lord's Prayer is that God either will not permit us to be exposed to temptations that are too strong for us or give us the grace necessary to triumph over them.

Like the other petitions of the *Pater Noster* this one should be recited always with thoughtfulness and sincerity for several important reasons. In the first place, we are constantly being exposed to temptations that arise from within ourselves or from some object or some person outside, or from the devil, whose profession is tempting men. Second, not only are we unable to live long without experiencing temptation, but we cannot overcome it without the help of grace. This grace is to be obtained in prayer, for our Savior exhorts us, "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" Third, the consequences of temptation are of prime importance to the salvation of our souls. To our last breath we are on the verge of the abyss, in constant danger of falling into it; at any moment we may forfeit that state of grace in which only death can establish us permanently. No holiness of state, no retirement from the world, however secluded, can insure freedom from temptation. And those persons who have

traveled farthest on the road to perfection are subject to the most subtle and dangerous temptations of all.

In a sense, then, of all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, this is the most necessary one. And while it would be a mistake to hope that grace will be given to save us from perils to which we have lightly exposed ourselves, yet we can never doubt that through the goodness and almighty power of our heavenly Father, help will be granted us for the asking in the temptations which inevitably arise, despite our watchfulness. Let us go forward steadfastly, then, between the two hazards of presumptuousness and faintheartedness, and we shall never pray in vain for strength against the snares of temptation.

Deeply conscious of my weakness and instability, I beg Your help, O Father in heaven, against my own follies. I acknowledge that I sometimes presume upon my strength, that I run into danger, and weaken myself by repeated small concessions to self-love. Deign to increase in me the virtue of supernatural prudence, that I may join vigilance to prayer, according to the admonition Your divine Son gave to His Apostles: "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*"

OCTOBER 16

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*Deliver Us From Evil*



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"But deliver us from evil!" (Mt. 6:13.)

This petition is, as it were, the positive side of the preceding one; by it we ask our Father to make us emerge unharmed from the moral and also the physical evil that He may allow to befall us.



Our Father who art in heaven, preserve us from all temporal misfortune that will not bring us nearer to You, our last and supreme Good.

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The evil from which we ask to be preserved by the providence of our heavenly Father in this last request of the Lord's Prayer is not only supernatural evil, or sin, but also the evils of this life, temporal misfortunes, which, indeed, have their ultimate source in sin or in the devil, who is the principal author of all evil. Even when temporal evils are not directly the result and the punishment of sin, they are, at least, the consequence of the first sin. Sometimes our Father judges it for our good that we suffer misfortune; in this case, may His holy will be done, but we have His direction to pray that evil may be averted from our bodies and material goods, and those of our brethren, as well as from our souls. In the Litany of the Saints the Church enumerates the various disasters from which she begs God to preserve her children; in this petition we summarize them in the one word: *evil*.

We ask for this deliverance because temporal misfortunes may become an occasion of sin, and because they ordinarily present an obstacle to peace and general order. But, should God judge it for our good to send us temporal afflictions, they are not then truly evils at all, but they may become real blessings through the use we make of them. Jesus voluntarily endured the greatest of temporal misfortunes, those from which human nature most shrinks; it would not become His followers, therefore, to indulge their natural aversion in such matters or judge them as human nature would dictate. Jesus made His sufferings serve to restore the divine glory, to expiate our sins, and to win for us the graces that

preserve us from sin or remove it from our souls. The perfect Christian will ask to be relieved of such afflictions, then, only in the spirit of the prayer of Jesus: "*Father, if it be thy will.*" Otherwise, he will endure temporal suffering patiently that God may be glorified and that he may sanctify his own soul.

Our chief aim in making this last petition of the *Pater Noster* should be that through our deliverance from evil we may serve God with a freer mind, with more love, gratitude, and fidelity. But there may never be in our minds a weighing of temporal misfortunes as against the sole true evil, which is sin. We must be prepared to endure the former in their most extreme form rather than escape from them at the price of a wound to conscience. Faith knows no evil except supernatural evil, that worst of misfortunes, which is an evil also for God. And since we are to love God above all things and more than ourselves, it is right that we should have a supreme and sovereign horror of sin, more because it touches the divine Majesty than because it injures us. Therefore, we include in this petition also the intention that we may be preserved from mortal sin, the cause of damnation which is itself the evil above all evils to be dreaded, and also from venial sin, which wounds the soul and makes it weak and languid in the service of God. Preserve me, O Lord God, and all those who are now being tried and afflicted by evils of body or soul. Grant me and all my brethren the grace to abandon ourselves to You when temporal misfortunes sadden and depress us. Above all, save us by Your light, Your forgiveness, and Your protection from all moral evil. Pity our weakness, O Father, that finds its only strength and all its strength in You.

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*The Purity of Our Lady*



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“You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you”  
(Cant. 4:7).

These words from the Canticle of Canticles, as applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary, bring before our minds the utter sacredness and purity befitting her who was to bring forth the Incarnate God. Mary’s sinlessness is part of the reverence due to God.

O Mary, increase my love of purity of heart and perfect this purity within me. . . .

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Perfect purity supposes exemption not only from every carnal fault, but likewise from all sin, mortal or venial, actual or original. It implies exemption also from ill-regulated movements of the passions and the disorders of concupiscence. While these imperfections, if they are involuntary, do not constitute sin, yet they are a consequence of original sin and lead to sin. Furthermore, perfect purity supposes the possession of sanctifying grace. The soul, even without sin, that did not possess sanctifying grace, would be like a diamond without its fire. The purity of the Mother of God contained all these perfections and, in addition, other privileges that are exclusively hers. There can be, of course, no question of sin where Mary is concerned; but neither did she know the ill-regulated movements of concupiscence, which are the consequences of original sin. Yet this extinction of concupiscence in her was not the result of the external protection of God, removing from her all such troubles and

attacks. It was the effect of grace, whereby all the faculties of her soul were kept in perfect subordination to her reason and will.

The purity of the Mother of God represents power with respect to God and to us. Three virtues give the soul influence with God: love, humility, and purity; but if purity be wanting, love and humility lose their potency. God is, before all things, infinite Purity, and nothing lacking in purity can please Him. We owe the Incarnation to the utter cleanliness of Mary, as St. Bernard so forcefully says: "By her purity she attracted the glance of God and by her humility she conceived Him." The purity of Mary also wields power over us. To realize this truth we have only to think of the beneficent influence of Mary through the ages and the attraction she has always had for mankind. The spectacle of her immaculate purity is presented to us under various charming forms: Mary as an infant, Mary in the Temple, Mary in her virginal retreat at Nazareth conversing with the angel; Mary, Virgin and Mother, with Jesus in her arms. The sweet radiance of her purity transforms hearts, the thought of her consoles and encourages. To love to think of her is in itself a sign that we are renouncing sin and aspiring to virtue. How efficacious is her protection for those who seriously struggle, who invoke her name and confide in her!

Let us form the resolution of imitating, according to our vocation, the purity of the Mother of God. Purity of heart which shuns every voluntary fault and knows how to master rebellious passions is the first condition for the spiritual life and the best preparation for heaven. Heaven is the home of purity where nothing defiled may enter, but on earth it is so easy to defile our soul. We who walk the ways of earth can scarcely avoid taking on some of the dust of the

road. This is why the work of purifying our heart can never cease while we are on earth. This is why we need constantly the help of heaven to support our weakness. Recourse to Mary, our sweetness and our hope, assures us of this help. Let us ask her protection in the words of one of her most eloquent clients in the early Church. St. Ephrem of Edessa:

“Most holy Lady, alone most pure in soul and body, alone exceeding all in perfection of purity, in chastity and virginity — alone made in thine entirety the home of the graces of the Holy Spirit . . . cast thine eyes upon me, my most holy Lady, Mother of God, full of grace. Glory of the nature that is ours in common; Dispenser of all good things; after the Trinity, the Mistress of all; after the Paraclete, another Counselor; after the Mediator, the whole world’s Mediatrix; than Cherubim and Seraphim higher, beyond power of words to tell, and more glorious by far; unsearchable Abyss of God’s goodness; Protection of the universe, Fullness of the grace of the Trinity!”

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OCTOBER 18

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*The Victory Over Satan*



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“But if I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk. 11:20).

The expulsion of the devil was the proof of his defeat; for if the prince of this world is no longer master in his own house, it is because one *stronger than he* has conquered him.

Divine Savior, preserve my soul from tepidity and all carelessness in Your service.

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The cure of a man possessed by a dumb devil occasioned the blasphemous accusation of the Pharisees that the miracles of Jesus were performed with the aid of the prince of the devils. The reply of Jesus consisted of three comparisons or figurative illustrations, which refuted His enemies on their own ground, by arguments drawn from their accusation itself. In the second comparison especially, that of the strong man and the one who was stronger, our Savior illustrated the relations of Himself and His kingdom with that of Satan. Satan was, indeed, the mighty prince, who because of sin, could claim the whole world as his kingdom. And it is to warn us of his power that the Church gives us repeatedly in the Gospel passage appointed to be read in the Mass an illustration of his might and trickery.

In a previous meditation we considered the temptation which our Savior deigned to suffer in the desert. Today, we are again reminded of the danger to which man is exposed from his invisible enemies. In a great number of passages the inspired writers of Scripture speak clearly of Satan and the demons as grim realities and as persons that are declared and mortal enemies of God and of human souls. They constitute a kingdom in deadly and unchanging opposition to the kingdom of God and His angels and saints. It is a fearful fact that in the world mighty forces of evil work in and through mankind against God and all that is good.

It is true that the Strong One was overcome and fettered by a Mightier who had the strength of God resting upon Him, but the divine Victor did not wholly deprive the devil of his power to do harm. Every man by the right use of his will must prove himself a loyal soldier under Christ's standard in his combat against the Enemy and, with Christ,

win the crown of victory. Our Savior did not come to re-make the material order or to change the world essentially, but to triumph over it and provide man with the means of protection against the evil that imperils his soul. Christ overcame by His teaching, His holy life, His sacrifices and sufferings, especially His passion and death on the cross. And what He did, He left us power to do by means of the supernatural helps He has bequeathed to His Church. With these helps: the Mass, the sacraments, and the other sources and channels of grace, all holy souls who have lived since the coming of Christ have overcome the world and the power of Satan. The conflict is a decisive one. We relapse into the Satan's power when we do not frankly declare ourselves for Jesus. All compromise drains our spiritual energy and makes us undeserving of the abundant graces that are given us when we remain loyal and generous.

*My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will free my feet from the snare. Look toward me, and have pity on me, for I am alone and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Put an end to my affliction and my suffering, and take away all my sins. Behold, my enemies are many, and they hate me violently. Preserve my life, and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, because I wait for you, O Lord (Ps. 24:15-21).*

## *The Praise of Mary*



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“Now it came to pass as he was saying these things, that a certain woman lifted up her voice from the crowd and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee.’ But he said, ‘Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it’” (Lk. 11:27, 28).

Following the exorcism and cure of the blind and dumb demoniac the Pharisees accused our Savior of being Himself possessed by a devil. In the midst of the discussion a woman from the crowd proclaimed the praise of the Mother of Jesus.

O Jesus, grant that I may deserve to be called blessed by You, because of my imitation of Your Mother’s faith and holiness of life.

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This spontaneous cry of praise was not addressed, as we should have expected it to be, directly to our Savior. The woman did not say, “Happy the heart that possesses such wisdom and the lips whose utterance breathes grace and the hands that lavish upon us so many wondrous favors!” In her thoughts this woman had made a very natural transition, and it was the Mother of Jesus whom she proclaimed as blessed. Perhaps she herself was a mother and therefore vividly comprehended the happiness of Mary in possessing such a Son, of caring for Him, of exercising parental rights over Him, and of holding a very special place in His heart. Yet, at the same time, her words praised Jesus also, in that they were clearly an expression of faith, admiration, and sincere devotion to Him. Moreover, she declared all this



publicly, in a loud voice: she *lifted up her voice from the crowd*, undeterred by the presence of the powerful enemies of Jesus, who were openly and freely indulging in mockery and derision of Him.

Our Savior's response did not deny the high prerogatives of His holy Mother. He seemed to say by implication, "Yes, blessed is she"; but then, quick to turn attention from Himself and center it upon His mission, He assigned another and a new reason for celebrating and proclaiming the blessedness of His Mother. In addition to her happiness of being united to Him by ties of blood, she was also blessed, and to a greater degree, because of her faith and holiness. The words of Jesus: "*they who hear the word of God and keep it*" immediately recall that which St. Luke tells us of Mary: *But Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart*. They make us think also of the words of Elizabeth to Mary: "*Blessed is she who has believed.*"

If we sense a correction in our Savior's reply, it is not at all to be understood as a restriction of the praise accorded to Mary; it was addressed to this woman and to all who place too high a value upon natural privileges and do not sufficiently esteem spiritual goods. But the reply of Jesus was also a consolation for the woman who spoke, as well as for all of us, since it shows us that the means of being united to our Savior, even as Mary was united to Him, are at our disposal, if we will to make use of them. These means are faith and conduct in conformity with our faith. Failing this bond of union with Jesus, even the divine maternity would have been of no spiritual avail for Mary. The whole importance of this episode lies in our Savior's affirmation and emphasis upon the necessity of faith and the incentive He offers us for living the life of faith.

O dearest Mother Mary, how sweet it is for your children to see your prophecy that all generations should call you blessed fulfilled from the very commencement of the kingdom of your Son. First, the angel Gabriel saluted you as *full of grace*; then, Elizabeth proclaimed your blessedness; and then, as the kingdom of Jesus began to extend its sway, Simeon in the Temple bore witness to you. Now your honor has spread to the people. The woman in the crowd praised your union with Jesus as His Mother, and if we belong to Jesus by faith and holiness of life, we belong also to you, His Mother. Like this woman, like all true Christians down the ages, I, too, wish to honor you. May I pass through this life, O Mary, with your rosary in my hand and your praise on my lips.

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*The Afflicted Woman in the Synagogue*



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“Now he was teaching in one of their synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent over and utterly unable to look upwards” (Lk. 13:10, 11).

This incident occurred as Jesus was traveling through Judea. It may record His last teaching in the synagogue; at any rate, among those present on this particular Sabbath was a woman pitifully afflicted by diabolical possession; or, perhaps, like holy Job, her body had been disfigured by the power of Satan.

Lord Jesus, help me to know myself.

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According to the text of St. Luke, Jesus merely happened to notice in the crowd this woman whose infirmity was cer-

tainly marked enough to attract attention. Her body had become so deformed that she could not even look upward. She herself did not ask for a cure, but Jesus, moved by pity, called her to Him and said, "*Woman, thou art delivered from thy infirmity.*" Then, as testimony to the cure and a pledge of His protection, *he laid his hands upon her.* Instantly, the bonds of Satan were broken and standing straight she gave glory to God. This whole scene was a scandal to the head of the synagogue. Jesus had again cured on the Sabbath! But he did not attack our Savior directly. Instead, with a glaring want of logic, he scolded the crowd in the synagogue, as if this miracle had been performed at their request. "*There are six days in which one ought to work,*" he said; "*on these therefore come and be cured, and not on the Sabbath.*" The ruler of the synagogue had our Savior in mind, but he reprimanded the people; perhaps, because he feared an embarrassing reply from Jesus, whereas the people would not venture to answer him.

The ruler of the synagogue had just been praying publicly that God would send the Messiah; he had just read or had heard read the Holy Scripture, which on every page speaks of mercy and charity for one's fellow men. Yet now, alleging zeal for the Sabbath precept, or rather his false interpretation of it, but in reality because of his hatred for Jesus, he was openly scandalized. Our Savior flayed this shamelessness as it deserved. "*Hypocrites!*" He said, "*does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or ass from the manger, and lead it forth to water? And this woman, daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound, lo, for eighteen years, ought not she to have been loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*" On the one hand, an *ox or ass*, on the other, a *daughter of Abraham*; untying an animal from the manger

as against delivering a human being from the bonds of Satan; leading an animal to water as against the simple imposition of hands; the Sabbath, which lasts for only twenty-four hours as contrasted with eighteen years of suffering under a most painful and disfiguring malady. Jesus spoke in the plural, perhaps because this man had found some supporters. In any case, the audience in general was well disposed toward Jesus; for while they were careful to keep silence, *the entire crowd*, says St. Luke, *rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.*

We share heartily in the indignation of our Savior at the pharisaical malice and hypocrisy of the head of the synagogue, but perhaps our own conduct has not always been free from this kind of secret envy. There may have been times in our lives when we, too, like the ruler of the synagogue, may have criticized even good that was done, under the pretext of zeal, but really out of jealousy. We should take care also that we do not imitate him in allowing our religious life to become a mechanical routine in which the inner spirit and life have been gradually extinguished.

O my divine Master, I constantly need Your help that I may see clearly the motives of my actions, which self-love is so ingenious in presenting as good and noble. Free me, as You delivered this poor infirm woman, from all fettering bonds of self-deceit.

*The Man With Dropsy*



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“And it came to pass, when he entered the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to take food, that they were watching him. And behold, there was a certain man before him who had the dropsy” (Lk. 14:1, 2).

The scene of this mystery seems to be across the Jordan in Perea or at its borders. Our Savior is dining at the house of one of the most influential members of the party of the Pharisees.

Lord Jesus, impart to me Your spirit in my dealings with those who may be hostile to me.

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St. Luke tells us that on a certain occasion our Savior entered the home of a ruler of the Pharisees to dine. The guests were Pharisees and doctors of the Law, whose actions and dispositions were those of their sect, as St. Luke strongly implies in the words, *they were watching him*; that is, to see whether He would permit Himself any liberties with their doctrines or usages. There could surely have been nothing agreeable in this prospect for our Savior, yet He accepted the invitation, as He had on other occasions, showing us again the magnanimity of His heart, always generous, always forgetful of self. Hardly had the guests taken their places on the couches set for the meal, when our Savior was put to the test by the presence of a man afflicted with dropsy. It is possible that he had been secretly brought in (although with no complicity on his part), so that a case of conscience might be raised; or it may be that his need and his confidence in Jesus had given the sick man courage

to come of his own accord into the room. He seems, however, to have said nothing, through fear of the Pharisees, perhaps because it was the Sabbath day. But how fitting it is that we should here as always find the suffering drawing near to Jesus! He is always in their midst, as the Good Shepherd surrounded by His sheep.

Now, as ever, Jesus was quick to see the poor sufferer and His compassion was immediately aroused. At the same time He knew that the Pharisees were watching, and that they had accused Him again and again of violating the Sabbath precept by curing the sick on the Sabbath day. Therefore He first put a simple question to the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law: "*Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?*" This He did in order to move them to look into themselves and sincerely reflect whether in fact reason and conscience would not permit such an act. His question made it necessary for them explicitly to give or withhold permission for the cure. According to their alleged convictions, they should have answered in the negative, but fearing a triumphant rebuttal from the Savior, they remained silent. Then Jesus answered His own question and announced His decision in a double form. First He answered with the deed itself. The man was healed of his dropsy and allowed to go.

Then Jesus suggested the proper response to His first question by asking another: "*Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him up on the Sabbath?*" Again there was silence, although the Pharisees knew well that even the most scrupulous Jew would not hesitate to go to the rescue in such an event, Sabbath day or not. The inference was very plain: if both reason and conscience agreed that such an action was not a violation of the Sabbath precept, so did they also agree, and with

even greater validity, where there was question of curing the sick.

Divine Savior, I contemplate with wonder and admiration Your patience and loving kindness. So many times You showed the Pharisees their error and as often they replied with the same accusations. Yet, on each occasion You instructed them with all forbearance and sincerity, although You knew well what was in their hearts. Help me to treat those who may bear me ill will always with patience and consideration and to be always ready to do good to them.

OCTOBER 22

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### *The Last Place*



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“But he also spoke a parable to those invited, observing how they were choosing the first places at table” (Lk. 14:7).

Jesus, having observed that His fellow guests at the house of the Pharisee were greatly preoccupied with the matter of precedence in their places at table, taught them a lesson in the guise of a parable.

O Jesus, teach me to form a just estimate of myself during life that I may claim mercy from You in eternity.

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The occasion of our Savior's little parable was the arrogance and pride shown by the guests at this repast at the Pharisee's house in their choice of a place at table. Jesus observed that they not only aspired to the first places but actually appropriated them. Even the presence of their most distinguished Guest did not move them to a show, at least,

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of good breeding. But this was only one aspect of their pride. They cherished no less an esteem for themselves from the spiritual point of view. The first places in the kingdom of heaven were also to belong to them by right. A second reason for the parable was the very goodness of the Heart of Jesus. He wished to be not only a guest but a benefactor, and heal the souls of His fellow guests as He had healed the body of the man afflicted with dropsy. Their malady, indeed, was far worse than dropsy, for their hearts were swollen with egoism and self-sufficiency; they were fairly bursting with pride. We may observe here also the intrepidity of our Savior. He attacks sin whenever He finds it; if it rears its head in public, if it becomes an occasion of scandal, He flays it publicly. Yet, in this instance, He chose the image of a marriage feast, partly, perhaps, for reasons of tact, so as to avoid offending the assembled guests by a direct reproof.

The parable advises one who has been invited to a wedding feast not to take the first place, for if a more distinguished guest were to come in, he would have to make way for him; whereas one who would unassumingly take the last place at table would be urged to go higher. As to meaning, the parable would seem at first glance to contain nothing more than a maxim of human wisdom, counseling discretion and reserve to avoid the humiliation which is so often the lot of the overbold. Our Savior did not disdain to appeal to motives of natural prudence in His teaching; on the contrary, He took human nature into account and harmonized His doctrine with it. Nature and the supernatural are not opposed; grace builds on nature, and nature placed at the service of grace makes the perfect Christian. But we may validly see a profound spiritual significance also in the choice of a



wedding feast instead of merely a dinner or an ordinary feast. The joy of the kingdom of heaven and of the reign of the Messiah was often represented in Jewish teaching and theological language by the figure of a wedding. Thus the question of precedence among the guests in the parable becomes the image of rank as it is ordered in heaven.

Finally, the moral of the parable was explicitly formulated by Jesus Himself: "*For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*" This is the basic law of order both on earth and in heaven, because it is the law of justice. It applies now to us as it applied of old to the Jews. With respect to heaven, no one can claim the kingdom of God as a thing due him. Eternal life is a gratuitous divine gift, and insofar as it can be won, it is won through humility; the humbler we become here below, the more we shall be glorified in heaven.

You know well, O divine Master, how proud I am in thought, word, and deed, how wanting in the lovely virtue of humility. Grant me a humble heart, and let my mind be deeply impressed with the realization of my nothingness and sinfulness. Let me even come to rejoice at being slighted, and to feel no resentment when others are preferred to me. With Your grace I shall henceforward aspire to be great only in Your sight and to become ever smaller and more lowly in my own.

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*The Humble To Be Exalted*



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"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 14.11).

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Jesus Himself drew the moral, so to speak, from His parable on choosing the last place at the wedding feast.

Divine Master, enlighten me interiorly that I may see and desire the beauty of true humility.

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In this parable our Savior gave the following advice: "*But when thou art invited, go and recline in the last place; that when he who invited thee comes in, he may say to thee, 'Friend, go up higher!'*" Jesus was not advising clever and artful calculation, however, whereby we choose the last place with a view to obtaining the first. There is an artificial humility that makes use of such devices for its own ends. One speaks ill of oneself in the hope of being contradicted; one affects humility in order to be esteemed. To act so is still to seek the first place, but by an indirect route. What Jesus recommended was a sincere effort to disappear and to serve without playing a shining role, in other words, humble disinterestedness. We should take the last place because we really wish to be there and not as an artifice for gaining advancement. The first place? Yes, when there is question of devotedness, hard work, and self-sacrifice; but when pleasures and honors are to be claimed, the last place should be our desire. We shall be truly humble when we seek humility more as justice than as a virtue, when we rejoice in contempt as our due, and when we are motivated by the knowledge that we deserve to be humiliated rather than by the desire of humiliation. Then shall we possess solid virtue and show ourselves worthy of our names of Christian, daughter of the Church, child of God, spouse of Christ.

There are occasions when the sincerity of our humility is tried. It is when we are overlooked, when without our seeking it we are assigned to a position or a task that we

may feel is unworthy of our talents, or when we are not given the place or work that we think is rightfully ours. Are we silent then, untroubled, without resentment or rancor? Do we really feel then that we are nothing and experience satisfaction in being so regarded? Inner rebellion at such times shows us the flaws and weaknesses in our practice of humility and self-abnegation. The humility that is Christian and deserving of the exaltation promised by our Savior is revealed in our customary way of acting, in our words, in our thoughts, especially with reference to the relative merits of ourselves and our neighbor; for we are inclined to exaggerate the good that is in ourselves and the evil that is in others. Christian humility is reflected also in our attitude toward God. Before Him, above all, we should take the lowest place, recognizing our nothingness, our powerlessness, and our sinfulness. The smaller we are in our own eyes, the more we shall be elevated and favored by God. It was through her humility that Mary became the Mother of God and the Queen of all the saints.

I acknowledge, O divine Master, that humiliations irritate me and disturb my peace of mind. I feel it keenly when I am forgotten and set aside. I admit an eagerness for praise and a dread of correction, even of kindly admonition. Through the intercession of the most humble Mary, Your Virgin Mother, I ask the grace of a sincere conviction that I deserve to be ignored and forgotten among creatures so that I may at last act only for Your glory, O most sweet, most holy, most humble Jesus!

## *A Counsel of Perfection*



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“But he also said to him who had invited him, ‘When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, or thy brethren, or thy relatives, or thy rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee’” (Lk. 14:12).

To His first counsel on taking the last place at the feast, our Savior added a second precept, which opened a still broader spiritual vista; it is not a rule of social conduct which Jesus formulated here, but a counsel of perfection.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to understand and follow Your doctrine in this mystery.

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It seems that after our Savior had taken His place at the table of the Pharisee, He began to take notice of His fellow guests. The host had probably invited members of his party, relatives, and rich neighbors. No thought, certainly, had been given to the poor of the neighborhood and, no doubt, as ordinarily happened on such occasions, these humbler folk had gathered in large numbers around the house. We have here exemplified the typical Pharisee point of view, the spirit of egoism which bestows a benefit only if a return may be expected. The conduct recommended by our Savior is precisely the opposite of this Pharisical practice. He said to His host, *“But when thou givest a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shalt thou be, because they have nothing to repay thee with; for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

Every word of this divine counsel requires meditation. Let us observe especially the intention we should have in our benefactions. All thought of temporal compensation should not only be set aside, but we should flee from and avoid human recompense. We should congratulate ourselves upon not receiving it and desire no other consolation than the heavenly reward. Our Savior here established a principle that is entirely supernatural and directly opposed to corrupt nature and egoism. Thus He revealed His own spirit, which was one of sublime disinterestedness and purest piety. To do good not with a natural aim or for earthly advantage, but solely for God and heaven — this is truly to act in the spirit of faith, in the spirit of Jesus. Our Savior does not forbid us to “invite our friends,” but from the aspect of eternity we can do more and better. The saints give us the example, and obedience to the counsel of Jesus would have led even His Pharisee host to sanctity. During our lives on earth we should love to do good without hope of return, without even the desire of a return. Those who give us nothing, not even gratitude, not even a polite “thank you,” those who seem not even to benefit by our acts of self-sacrifice — to these we must love to give and give again.

It is an altogether new path of well-doing that our Savior opens to us; upon it we shall find a new happiness: “*Blessed shalt thou be,*” Jesus said, “*because they have nothing to repay thee with.*” Our happiness will be the happiness of God in giving to men; and on the day of the resurrection God will substitute Himself for those who on earth could not or did not make us a return for our bounty. How un-Christian is our conduct if we find happiness only in giving to those who make a return! How narrow is our heart if it cannot taste the happiness of disinterested giving!

Fill me, good Jesus, with the understanding and desire of Your spirit. Enable me to overcome my human desires of appreciation and gratitude, so that I shall not only not look for a human reward, but count myself fortunate in not receiving it. With Your grace I shall be able to serve others in the spirit of faith and perfect disinterested charity, and so rise to the supernatural heights to which You invite me.

OCTOBER 25

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### *Parable of the Great Supper*



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“A certain man gave a great supper” (Lk. 14:16).

In this parable of the supper our Savior foretold the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles, who were to fill the places refused by the Jews.

Divine Savior, help me to comprehend better the privilege that is mine in being permitted to receive You in Holy Communion.

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The supper mentioned in the parable is a figure of the Eucharistic Banquet which God has prepared for all humanity. The guests, His Chosen People, were the first to be invited, but when they heard the promise of Jesus, “*The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world,*” many of them *turned back and no longer went about with him.* Yet the Lord prepared His supper and invited His people again; it was to the lost sheep of Israel that the Apostles were first sent. But their invitation was also rejected by the great and powerful, the doctors of the Law, whereupon the Apostles gathered in the poor and the lowly, but *still there*

[was] *room*. And so the Apostles left Jerusalem and traveled the highways of the world, bringing in to the holy table the Gentiles from pagan and barbarian lands.

Who is it that invites us to partake of His supper? It is Jesus Christ, God and Man, our Savior and our Judge. He Himself comes to greet us, not clothed in the radiance of His majesty, for that splendor would only terrify us, but in the humble little Host. What can we do but cry out like St. Elizabeth, "Whence is it that my Lord should come to me?" And protest with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy!" Jesus wills to be at once our Host and our Feast that we may have Him as our Companion, as our Strength, and as the Pledge of our final beatitude. He does not, therefore, give us this blessed Food once only and then bid us go our way alone, but He invites us to come again and again to His banquet hall, that He may be our daily Bread.

Our own dispositions of mind and heart should respond insofar as they can to this great love of Jesus. With lively faith we should say to Him, "*I do believe, Lord; help my unbelief.*" We should offer Him our profound adoration: *Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us.* In humility and contrition we should confess our guilt: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.*" In gratitude we should exclaim, *How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?* And we should say to ourselves with entire confidence, "*If I touch but his cloak I shall be saved.*" It is for our benefit, not for His own, that Jesus invites us. All grace is enclosed in the sacrament of His adorable Body and Precious Blood; and He works for our maladies of soul the very same miracles of healing that He wrought upon the sick and broken bodies of Judea long ago.

My Savior, it is not a figure or representation or portion of Yourself which I receive in Holy Communion. It is Your whole Person with all Your merits and satisfaction for sin which You offered for me as well as for the Apostles at the Last Supper. You bade me as well as them to eat the Bread and drink of the Cup, so as to *proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*. O incomprehensible invention of wisdom, power, and love! Fear and adore, O my soul, and love this Lord who found so sweet a way to penetrate the wall of flesh which is ever an impassable barrier between human hearts. O Jesus, teach me to use each sacramental union with You as a preparation for the next, so that when my last Communion comes, I may but exchange the heaven of You in my heart for the heaven in which I shall see You in all Your beauty face to face, forever.

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### *Parables of the Divine Mercy*



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“Now the publicans and sinners were drawing near to him to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ But he spoke to them this parable” (Lk. 15:1-3).

Our Savior, surrounded by an audience of publicans and sinners, is reproached by the Pharisees. In reply He delivers a series of parables illustrating the divine mercy.

Divine Shepherd, teach me to appreciate better the extent of Your mercy toward me and all mankind.

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The persons in two of the parables delivered by Jesus on this occasion are a shepherd or owner of a flock, who has lost



one of his sheep, and a woman, who has lost a drachma. In both cases that which has been lost is an external, material possession dear to the owner, however insignificant it may seem to others. For the man who possesses only a hundred sheep a single one has its value; and to a poor woman one drachma is a large sum. It is the wage of a day's hard work, and its loss in this instance appears to be felt so keenly that the nine drachmas which are still in possession seem to count for nothing. Anxiety, too, is expressed by the painful efforts made to recover the lost goods. The shepherd scours the desert wastes, calling aloud. A lost sheep is, in fact, deserving of pity, since the sheep has neither instinct to find its way back to the fold nor means of defense. And so, when the shepherd finds the lost one, he does not punish it or show anger, but carries it joyfully on his shoulders back to the fold. In the other case, the woman lights a lamp. She makes a thorough search of every nook and corner of her modest home; she expends almost more light and effort than a drachma is worth. And then, what joy is expressed when the quest is rewarded! Again, as with the shepherd, it wells up from the heart into glad exclamations and finds a sympathetic echo in the hearts of neighbors and friends.

The meaning of the parables is briefly indicated in the words, "*I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance.*" The application is clear; it is the mercy of God that is described in the parable, from a threefold point of view: the value which God attaches to the soul of the sinner, the zeal with which He seeks after it, and His triumphant joy when He has recovered it. A twofold purpose is also evident in this moving instruction of

our Savior. He wishes to encourage and console the sinners who are gathered around Him, by revealing to them in figure the infinite divine mercy and so draw them to repentance and conversion. On the other hand, the parables are designed to correct the view of the Pharisees with regard to sinners, for they banished them from the kingdom of God in advance and took scandal at their efforts to reform their lives. God, on the contrary, values and loves these souls. He seeks after them with eagerness and rejoices at their return to Him, while the angels of heaven, the *friends and neighbors* of God, share His joy. We are given a glimpse in these parables of the value God places upon our souls. We are shown His standards for the mercy and zeal we are to practice toward those with whom we deal in our apostolic work, especially sinners. Finally, the meaning of the parable as our Savior reveals it shows that the only real cause for sorrow is the loss of divine grace and the only true joy is the recovery of our intimacy with God.

O my God, I adore Your divine mercy and I am deeply grateful for the many operations of Your clemency toward me. You are ever seeking me by the inspirations of grace, You carry me on Your shoulders, as it were, by Your sacraments. Help me to grieve over my least infidelities, and grant me the light and guidance of Your Holy Spirit to recover the lost drachma of intimate union with You, so that it may be with Your mercy and Your zeal that I win for You the hearts of others.

## *The Prodigal Son*



“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me’” (Lk. 15:11, 12).

Like the two parables which precede it in the same chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel and which were yesterday the subject of our meditation, the parable of the prodigal son defends the divine love and mercy toward repentant sinners. But in this case that which is lost is not a material possession, but a tenderly cherished son.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of finding my pleasure in You alone.

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In the parable of the prodigal son, which has been described as “the pearl and crown of all the parables of Scripture,” the waywardness of the Prodigal is vividly portrayed. He insolently demands his share of the inheritance; he callously leaves his father and his paternal home, and wastes his patrimony in extravagant living. Then, his unhappiness is depicted with equal clarity. It is, in fact, the young man’s misery and misfortune rather than the shamefulness of his conduct that are emphasized in the parable. We are shown how the abuse of his freedom reduced him to both interior and exterior destitution. He was degraded even to the point of keeping swine, which for the Jews was a symbol of extreme moral corruption. Even worse, he envied the animals the food that was given to them.

The entire parable is a representative of the gradual descent of the soul into sin. The soul that lives amid the

abundance and peace of divine grace and fellowship is apt to lose the realization of what it is to be without these blessings. This soul become restless and eager to taste forbidden delights that appear so attractive. There follows impatience with rules and restraints; the road to heaven begins to seem a long and narrow way. Then, the soul claims as its own that which has been granted it by the liberality and goodness of God, and squanders in self-gratification its countless gifts and graces in both the natural and supernatural order. The inevitable result is disillusionment and a sense of guilt; and the soul finally discovers that it has not found freedom according to its desire, but has only changed masters.

The parable describes this sad awakening in the case of the Prodigal, and also his sincere repentance. One day, St. Luke tells us, the young man came to himself. He compared his present state with his former condition in life. Interior unhappiness and exterior afflictions as well often have the effect of drawing the sinner's attention to the inspirations of grace. He thought of his father and his father's goodness and decided to return and ask pardon. His resolution was manly and sincere: "*I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father. I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son.'*" Here is the image of true repentance and perfect conversion. If we would enter into ourselves in recollected prayer, we should draw into our souls stronger rays of the divine light. The recognition of our own sinfulness, the thought of our heavenly Father's goodness and mercy to us, and the all-pervading action of divine grace begin the work of true conversion in the soul. Then, humble confession and the good resolution firmly put into practice are its completion. Let us ask these graces for ourselves and for all sinners.

“We have offended Thy goodness, O God, by our sins; forgive us and pour out Thy mercy upon us. Remember that we are the work of Thy hands, frail though we be. We beseech Thee, suffer not another to usurp the honor of Thy name. Pardon us the evil we have done, and grant us good things even beyond our prayer, that thus we may be well pleasing to Thee, now and forever” (from a hymn composed by St. Gregory the Great).

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*Return of the Prodigal*



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“I will get up and go to my father” (Lk. 15:18).

Picture the Prodigal returning in humility and sincerity and with firm resolution to his father’s house.

Father in heaven, grant me the strength to sacrifice everything that could keep me from loving and serving You perfectly.

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Meditation which does not lead to resolution is inefficacious; but a resolution that is not put into immediate practice runs the risk of passing into the category of abandoned projects. Our Savior did not tell us what it cost the Prodigal to keep his resolution, nor how many times he was tempted to turn back during his journey homeward. It is not unlikely, however, that he asked himself with some dismay what sort of welcome he would receive, if, indeed, he were to be received at all; or whether he would be able to endure the embarrassment and humiliation that in all probability awaited him. It sometimes requires heroism to break with one’s

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sinful tendencies and sincerely to amend one's life. For this reason we are inclined to allow our souls to remain captive for an indefinite period, fluctuating between the desire to be free and the inability to form an effective resolution to bring this about.

Three ways of acting upon a resolution are open to us. Resting complacently in our well-meaning but ineffectual desires, we may continually postpone their realization. The folly and danger of such a course is noted in the Book of Proverbs, where we read that *the sluggard's propensity slays him*. You desire to be a worthy Sister of the Holy Cross. Then, surely, you will carefully observe the Rule that will make you such. You desire a place among the saints; then, you will seriously try to correct your faults and imperfections. Again, we may resolve firmly to begin at last to work in earnest at our sanctification, yet we make certain reservations; for example, we limit the extent of our renouncement where there is question of a particular place or person or some object, quite trivial, perhaps, in itself. Yet, a fine silken thread about its leg keeps the bird from taking flight as effectively as an iron chain. Or we may sincerely and strongly determine to end all compromise and mediocrity, whatever it may cost us, and without delay. If this be our disposition of soul, we shall place ourselves in the hands of the divine Physician, like a sick person who allows himself to be treated entirely as the doctor directs. Totally submissive to the divine will, we shall view persons, places, and employments with impartiality and be content to retain or dispose of all things as obedience may direct. Our sole aim will be to serve God as perfectly as possible and to lose no opportunity of proving that we love Him above all things.

O my God, I have promised to work only for Your glory and for

the salvation of souls. With the help of Your grace I shall keep this promise, however difficult the sacrifices You may ask of me. Renew me, my God, in the spirit of my mind and clothe me with the new man, which has been created according to You in justice and holiness of truth.

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OCTOBER 29

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*The Welcome Given the Prodigal*



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“But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him” (Lk. 15:20).

The last portion of the parable of the prodigal son serves primarily to emphasize God’s merciful love for sinners. This divine love is so great and so incomprehensible to us that sometimes, like the elder brother of the Prodigal, we are tempted to complain.

Father in heaven, inspire in me a greater confidence in your infinite mercy, and enable me to impart this confidence to others.

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It was not by mere chance that the father of the Prodigal saw his son *while he was yet a long way off*. He had never given up hope of his return, and we can imagine him climbing the hill near his house every morning and evening, like the mother of the young Tobias, scanning the horizon on every side as far as his eyes would reach. He immediately recognized his son in the half-starved and ragged traveler approaching his house. He ran to meet him and checked

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with his embraces the Prodigal's humble confession. In addition, he restored him fully to his former condition and rights, which are signified by the robe, ring, and sandals. Then there is a feast for which the fattened calf is killed, the joyful eagerness of the father showing itself in his order for the preparation for the merrymaking: "*Bring out the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost and is found!*"

The father in the parable is the image of the Father of mercies, yet a very imperfect image. His generous forgiveness and loving reception of the Prodigal, which would seem contrary to all likelihood in an earthly father, are only as a shadow of the mercy of God to the repentant sinner. The father of the Prodigal waits for his son, he does not go in search of him. God never loses sight of the sinner, but pursues him with the interior and exterior impulses of His grace. In this respect, the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep gives us a more vivid image of the mercy of God. In the Old Testament also we find the prophet Ezechiel representing the Lord God as a shepherd who seeks his sheep through lonely deserts and rocky places and brambles. He gently entices them back to the fold, promising them the richest pastures near the riverbank and on the mountains of Israel. He offers to bind up their wounds and strengthen their weakness. Every argument that love can devise is put forward to persuade the lost sheep to return to the shepherd.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are filled with such illustrations of the infinite divine goodness and mercy; and our heavenly Father wishes us to imitate His zeal in the reclaiming of the Prodigals and the lost sheep. Aware as we are of our own frailty and in appreciation of God's



many favors to us, we should extend to all sinners our pity and the charity of our prayers, especially to those who are hardened in sin; for the greater the sin committed and the more frequent its repetition, the more difficult it is, ordinarily speaking, for the sinner to repent. The love of the heavenly Father does not change, but the sinner becomes gradually less able to return to Him. The habit of praying for sinners is not only a work of fraternal charity, but also a proof of our love for God. If by our prayers we have won the grace of repentance for only one sinner, we have added more glory to God and greater joy to all heaven than could be produced by *ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance*.

*O Lord, your kindness reaches to heaven; your faithfulness, to the clouds. Your justice is like the mountains of God; your judgments, like the mighty deep; man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your kindness, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They have their fill of the prime gifts of your house; from your delightful stream you give them to drink. For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light (Ps. 35:6-10).*

OCTOBER 30

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### *Our Lady, Mother of Mercy*



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“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!” (from the hymn *Salve Regina*.)

Under Christ, who is our Lord and King, we revere Mary as our Lady and Queen; and because she shares in the goodness as well as in the power of God she merits as one of the greatest of her titles that of “Mother of Mercy.”

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My Queen and Mother, obtain for me a deep hatred of sin and a profound trust in your power and mercy.

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God has absolute dominion over all created things; He can do with them as He wishes. Having given Mary the authority of a mother over His Son, who is Himself God, He has given her marvelous power over everything that is subject to her Son. "For how would it be possible, O Blessed Virgin," asks St. Peter Damian, "that He whom thou didst bring forth, even though He is almighty, should resist the maternal authority He has given thee over Him?" Through Jesus, therefore, Mary has not only a primacy of honor with regard to the angels and saints, but a real power to command both angels and men. Before her the angels bow in homage by reason of her unique dignity and the dazzling beauty of her soul. But Mary is queen of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, of the confessors, virgins, and all the saints by a most tender and intimate title, in that all their merits and glory are due under Christ to her. We likewise owe all our graces under Jesus to her. Every blessing that helps us on our way to God, although unsolicited and unacknowledged, comes to us through the ever vigilant, suppliant omnipotence of Mary's intercession.

Mary is, then, really and truly queen; but so sweet and clement a Sovereign Mistress is she that the Church salutes her also as Mother of Mercy. "I am the Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy," said our Lady to St. Bridget: "I am the joy of the just and the door through which sinners are brought to God. There is no sinner on earth so accursed as to be deprived of my mercy." All sinners now in heaven owe their salvation, after Jesus, to Mary. It is likely that her prayers obtained the conversion of the Good Thief and the

grace of repentance for Peter. Judas also would have been saved by her intercession; but, although Mary is all-powerful with the Heart of God, her good offices can be thwarted by an obstinate human will; sinners who have recourse to her must be resolved to amend their lives.

A deep detestation of sin is one of the first graces our Lady obtains for those who submit to her maternal influence. This gift lies at the root of all perfection and provides supernatural energy for our perseverance. If God were to permit us to choose for ourselves any one of the extraordinary gifts that He has given His saints, we could not do better than to ask for the profound hatred of sin which they possessed. We are all sinners, and the more we grow in holiness, the more intensely conscious we become of our sinfulness and the more compunction we feel. We can all join St. Bonaventure in saying to Mary, "Who are the subjects for mercy, if not the miserable? And since thou art the Queen of mercy and I am the most miserable of sinners, it follows that I am the first of thy subjects. How then, O Lady, canst thou do otherwise than exercise thy mercy on me?"

"O purest, best, and most merciful Lady, help and relief of the faithful, powerful comforter of the afflicted and assured refuge of sinners, forsake us not, but keep us ever under thy protection. If thou forsake us, to whom shall we have recourse? What would become of us without thee, most holy Mother of God, who art the spirit and life of Christians? Even as respiration is an infallible sign of life in our bodies, so is thy holy name, when it is constantly on the lips of thy servants, not only a sign, but a veritable cause of life, happiness, and protection" (St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople).

LAST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER

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*Jesus Christ the King*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 868)

NOVEMBER 1

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*All Saints*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 870)

NOVEMBER 2\*

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*The Unjust Steward*



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“What is this that I hear of thee?” (Lk. 16:2)

In the parable of the unfaithful steward Jesus teaches us that just as the master of the steward, upon hearing that his servant was wasting his master's goods, summoned him to give an account, so God will demand an account of our use of the natural and supernatural goods He has entrusted to each one of us.

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\* If a meditation for the feast of All Souls is preferred, see September 11, p. 619.

Good Jesus, show me wherein I am failing to use Your gifts according to Your will.

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Like the rich master in the parable God is just and bountiful, but He watches over His goods and He demands an accounting of His servants' management of them. One day, we as religious will have to account to God for the development of our minds and our souls according to the measure required by our vocation and our duties. It would be well for us to ask ourselves occasionally whether we are applying our minds and our wills with interest and with a pure intention to those studies and employments which are assigned to us by our Superiors. Perhaps, through sloth or caprice, we have failed to gain the knowledge that is justly required by our duties; perhaps we have wasted precious time in occupations which bear no useful relation to the work assigned us. For all this we shall have to answer to our Sovereign Lord.

If our advancement in the knowledge suitable to our state and employment is to be the subject of a strict accounting, how much greater is our responsibility with regard to growth in the spiritual life! On the great day of our judgment we shall behold in the light of eternal truth what we have said, thought, and done, day after day, beside all the graces bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit to draw us closer to Jesus Christ. We shall see how our Savior came day after day offering light and strength to our frail and inconstant souls, only to have His voice hushed by our headlong impulsiveness, our fickleness, and our want of recollection. So many confessions and Holy Communions, and yet one Holy Communion well received could have made us saints! So many religious exercises wherein we might have found strength

of will to root out our faults and replace them with the virtues proper to a religious! So many particular examens which could have shown us our real selves and the enemy which may still be reigning undisturbed within us! So many Holy Masses where a God immolates Himself as Victim for us and at which we, perhaps, have often been pre-occupied and insensible witnesses. The Rule, especially the rule on silence, continually offers us opportunities of entering within ourselves and of holding with our Lord the conversations we are forbidden to have with others. But how often it happens that even when we are apparently silent and alone, our imagination peoples our minds and hearts with a whole world of thoughts and affections that in no way facilitate recollection and union with our divine Master!

The steward of the parable, negligent, faithless, shallow, but yet, in his way, shrewd and ingenious, is praised by his rich master for the adroitness with which he provides for the future. And Jesus, speaking in His own name, concludes the parable with the words: "*And I say to you, make friends for yourselves with the mammon of wickedness, so that when you fail they may receive you into the everlasting dwellings*"; that is to say, like the *children of this world* who are cleverer in looking after their material interests than the *children of light* in prompting their supernatural ones, be ingenious in making friends who will welcome you in eternity.

I understand, O my God, Your message to me in this parable.

All that I have and all that I am come from You. Life, health, faculties of soul and body, all natural and supernatural gifts are Yours, and one day You will ask me for an accounting of my use of them. Forgive my negligence in the past and grant me the grace to use Your gifts henceforward always and only according to Your good pleasure.

*The Rich Man and Lazarus*



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“There was a certain rich man who used to clothe himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted every day in splendid fashion. And there was a certain poor man named Lazarus, who lay at his gate” (Lk. 16:19, 20).

This parable seems to follow by a natural sequence the immediately preceding parable of the unfaithful steward. Both parables illustrate the teaching of our Savior on the right use of wealth, but the parable of the rich man seems also to be a stern warning to the Pharisees of the frightful chastisements they may expect for their hardness of heart.

O Jesus, help me to know and to fulfill more perfectly my obligations in the apostolic life.

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The picture drawn by our Savior presents in sharp contrast the two main characters of the parable, the wicked rich man and the poor Lazarus. The austere and mortified life of St. John the Baptist is summed up by the Evangelists in two characteristic features: his food is locusts and honey and he was clothed in a garment of camel's hair. Similarly, the self-indulgent life of the rich man in the parable is represented by the luxury of his table and the purple and fine linen in which he was clothed. His life of ease and princely magnificence is thus vividly set against the destitution and abandonment of the beggar Lazarus.

Then, having swiftly drawn this impressive picture, Jesus transports us immediately to the next world, where we see the same persons in entirely changed circumstances. We

are left to assume that Lazarus had endured his sufferings without complaint during his life on earth, and so now we see him receiving honors and enjoying the happiness reserved for the elect. The rich man, on the contrary, is in torment, and we hear him pleading that the once despised Lazarus might be permitted to bring him only the very slightest relief, merely a drop of water; but he implores in vain, because the change in their conditions is irrevocable. Beyond the grave the boundaries of happiness and misery are fixed forever; on the one side, suffering without end or alleviation; on the other, repose in the bosom of the Father, that is, in the abode of the blessed. Between the two lies an impassable abyss.

We are taught two lessons in this parable: that the rich have a duty to assist the poor and that a life of wealth mispent and a life of uncomplaining poverty meet with opposite fates in eternity. By the vow of poverty we have given up material riches, but we are the possessors of other far more precious wealth, which it is our duty to distribute to the poor. God has chosen us to be the dispensers of the goods of the spirit. By our teaching and example we are to share with others the divine light and the fruits of divine grace which are so lavishly offered to us. Woe be to us if we accept the generosity of divine Providence, which has bestowed upon us a blessed liberty from material cares, but fail to make the proper use of our freedom! The sole purpose for which this boon has been granted us is that we might be free to think upon the things of the Lord and, becoming ourselves holy in body and spirit, might give generously to the poor and the infirm, that is, to sinners and the un-instructed, the alms of apostolic zeal.

O my Savior, You have called me to the care of Your poor.



Fill my hands with alms for them. Daily they come to me, the precious souls whom You have placed in my charge. Help me to bestow Your bounty freely upon them by my words and example, without my ever counting the cost to my convenience or my strength. Let me not misspend Your wealth, good Master, but help me so to live that the treasures of Your grace and love will flow through me to others in ever purer and more abundant streams.

NOVEMBER 4

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## *Hell*



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“I am tormented in this flame” (Lk. 16:24).

This futile cry of the rich man in our Savior’s parable reminds us of the nature of eternal reprobation, where the lost can receive no assuagement of their sufferings.

O my Savior, grant to me and to all men a salutary fear of hell.

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To think on hell is salutary for the soul. In the first place, this thought, deeply and seriously dwelt upon, is capable of removing sin entirely from our lives. *Remember thy last end*, Holy Scripture admonishes us, *and thou shalt never sin*. St. Bernard urges us to descend often into hell in spirit during life, that we may not after death find ourselves condemned there. If it were given us to experience only for an instant the pains of the damned, we should never again commit a deliberate sin. But our knowledge of hell needs not the support of such experience, even if it were possible for us to have it, since we learn of its terrors from

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the lips of the Savior Himself. He revealed them to us in the divine decree which is to be pronounced upon the reprobate: "*Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire.*" *Depart from me*: as the happiness of heaven consists essentially in the possession of God, so the loss of Him is the greatest evil suffered by the lost soul.

To be deprived of God is total misery, and it is essential to the hell of the sinner that he clearly know his loss. God is all our good; without Him there is only evil, complete and unqualified. By the whole force of its nature, the lost soul, endowed with never-ending existence, eternally tends toward God. Damnation means the final and never-ceasing frustration of this craving of an immortal being. With all its powers the soul wants God and knows that it wants Him, yet at every instant it feels an irresistible disgust, a loathing and hatred, turning it away from its sole desire. The damned have suffered the Great Failure: in this life the impulse to make a new start after failure is instinctive, but after the final disaster there can be no fresh beginning.

The suffering which is over and above the essential pain of the loss of the Beatific Vision is, as it were, accessory. There is the added torment of eternal duration, a thought which wearies the brain and stupefies the understanding. Yet Jesus Himself revealed it most clearly and explicitly in foretelling the words of doom to be pronounced upon the damned. "*Depart . . .*" the Sovereign Judge will say, "*into the everlasting fire.*" When one is confronted with the prospect of endless suffering and yet heartened at the same time by the reflection that until our last breath we are master of our eternity, even a lifetime devoted to penance seems easy and light. Again, Jesus spoke of the *gnawing worm*. This may represent either

the foul and loathsome state of the lost soul, or its fixed and soul-rending memory of the means of salvation that had been offered to it on earth and which it had refused. There is also the pain of fire, the mysterious but real and inextinguishable fire of hell. Eternally it burns and ever with the same intensity, yet it never consumes the soul, which remains immortal in the midst of enveloping flames. St. Jude in his Epistle gives us the following divinely inspired description of the wicked, which helps us to understand the state of the damned. He calls them *clouds without water, carried about by the winds; trees in the fall, unfruitful, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom the storm of darkness has been reserved forever.*

All, O my Savior, except hell! Give me trials and chastisements here below, but not that unhappiness without recourse, the weight of Your malediction and eternal hatred. As You are infinitely good and liberal in the bounty of Your love, so infinitely mighty are You in the avenging of Your outraged justice. Deign to penetrate my heart with Your holy fear, and continue to protect me by Your grace from falling into grievous sin. I thank You profoundly, dear Jesus, for all Your goodness to me, and I beg You by the infinite merits of Your Sacred Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to grant to all sinners who are to die this day the grace of a good death.

## *The Ten Lepers*



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“And as he was entering a certain village, there met him ten lepers” (Lk. 17:12).

Our Savior was on His way to Jerusalem for His last celebration of the Pasch. He was passing along the frontiers of Samaria and Galilee, giving the last instructions and distributing the last favors of His public life.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace of pleasing You by my gratitude for Your goodness to me.

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It would seem from the Gospel account that the lepers met our Savior by chance, yet they might have heard reports of His presence in their district. Standing some distance away, as the Law prescribed, they called out to Jesus imploring a cure. Their cry itself, “*Jesus, master, have pity on us,*” shows respect and confidence; and a special circumstance in connection with their cure further reveals their strong faith. Jesus bade them go and show themselves to the priests. They hastened to obey, although there was a law forbidding lepers to enter a town before they were cured; and it was while they were enroute that the miracle was performed. The presentation to the priests had been prescribed only to establish officially the fact of the cure, thus assuring the lepers of the restoration of their social privileges. Here, as in the other cure of the leper recorded in the Gospel, Jesus conformed exactly to the prescription of the Law and at the same time He tested the obedience as well as the faith

of the lepers; for their blind obedience *they were made clean.*

Of these lepers cured by our Savior, nine were Israelites and one a Samaritan. We may see in them a symbol of Judaism and the Gentile world, first, in their common misery. Both Jews and Gentiles were in sin, which is represented by the leprosy; for this disease commonly symbolizes sin in scriptural imagery. St. Paul writes to the Romans, *For God has shut up all in unbelief that he may have mercy on all;* and again, *For there is no distinction, as all have sinned and have need of the glory of God.* The ten lepers are also a figure of the Jews and Gentiles in that they have a common Deliverer. All come to the Savior and receive their cure from Him, because in Him alone is the salvation of all.

But it is particularly the virtue of gratitude that Jesus recommends to us in this mystery. We see from His own words that He was sensibly affected by the ingratitude of the *nine.* "*Were not the ten made clean?*" He said, "*But where are the nine?*" On the other hand, He commended the tenth leper for his gratitude: "*Has no one been found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner?*" And he said to him, "*Arise, go thy way, for thy faith has saved thee.*" "I have found many who are fair and just toward men," a pagan writer has observed, "but none who is so toward God." When unhappiness or misfortune comes to us, we are quick to complain and to implore God for relief; but when the difficulty has been removed, we often forget to thank Him. Yet, are not our days woven entirely of divine blessings? Moreover, we are not even aware of all the misfortunes from which the divine Protection preserves us and of all the blessings that the divine Mercy heaps upon us. Let us not allow even one day to pass without our returning to glorify God and give Him thanks.

Divine Savior, grant me a strong and abiding realization of what I personally owe to Your mercy, that my heart may be constantly filled with thanksgiving. Teach me how I should manifest my gratitude to You and to others who are Your instruments in doing good to me. But let me not become impatient when others do not show me the gratitude I expect from them. You foresaw the ingratitude of the *nine* and yet You cured them. After Your example and with Your grace, I shall continue to show kindness even to the ungrateful, for no one could ever be as ungrateful to me as I have been to You.

NOVEMBER 6

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### *Perseverance in Prayer*



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“And he also told them a parable — that they must always pray and not lose heart” (Lk. 18:1).

Our Savior had been speaking of the future and of the trials that would precede His second coming; now He reinforced the instruction by a parable exemplifying the power of persevering, even importunate, prayer.

O Jesus, grant me the dispositions which will make my prayer pleasing to You and efficacious.

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The parable of the unrighteous judge and the suppliant widow well illustrates our Savior's maxim that we should pray always and without growing weary. It presents to us a very striking example of efficacious prayer in almost hopeless circumstances. The judge in the parable, as was commonly the case among members of his profession in the

Orient, was an unscrupulous man, so hardened in evil-doing that he dreaded neither the penalties of divine justice nor discredit in the eyes of men. Lacking those substitutes for conscience which are found among even the wicked, namely, self-respect and fear of public censure, he was led only by self-interest and caprice. The widow, on the other hand, was entirely without protection and defense; supplication was her only means of redress, but she applied herself to this, her sole recourse, with such persistence that in the end she triumphed. "*I will do her justice,*" said the judge, "*lest by her continual coming she finally wear me out.*" Then our Savior made the application: "*Hear what the unjust judge says; and will not God avenge his elect, who cry to him day and night? And will he be slow to act in their case? I tell you that he will avenge them quickly.*" If persevering prayer succeeded in prevailing over the selfishness and perversity of the godless judge of the parable, what power will it not have over the heart of our most loving Father in heaven?

But in order to be efficacious, prayer must fulfill certain conditions: it must be persevering, earnest, tireless — *day and night*, says our Savior. We must not leave off praying because doubts assail us or boredom or weariness. Perseverance itself gives to prayer a new power, a power which guarantees success; for perseverance implies trust, humility, determination, and intense desire. "There is," says Bossuet, "one way of forcing God and wresting from Him His graces and that is to keep asking without growing weary." Finally, as He concluded His instruction, our Savior uttered mysterious words which seemed to slip out, to escape, as it were, the Sacred Heart. "*Yet,*" He said, "*when the Son of Man comes, will he find, do you think, faith on the earth?*" On the one hand, He saw all that He was doing to implant faith in the hearts of

mankind and, on the other, the dreadful misery which men, especially His own people, were to bring upon themselves through their stubborn refusal to believe in Him or trust Him. This sorrowful utterance of Jesus appears to mean: When man's deliverance is at hand, that is, when the Son of Man is about to return to the earth, will faith and confidence be present so as to move the hearts of men to that prayer which alone will save them?

My Jesus, knowing our helplessness, You command us to pray always. Arouse in me an intense desire for all that You will to give in response to my prayer. Let me pray to You from a heart that is convinced of its own nothingness; from a heart that is full of faith because its supplications are addressed to You, the omnipotent Author of all our good; from a steadfast heart that ceaselessly offers up its longings to You. For without Your help we are nothing, we have nothing, we can do nothing.

NOVEMBER 7

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### *The Pharisee and the Publican*



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“But the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his breast, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me the sinner!’” (Lk. 18:13)

Jesus, seeing among His listeners *some who trusted in themselves as being just and despised others*, instructed them by the parable of the publican and the Pharisee who went up to the Temple to pray.



Lord Jesus, deepen my understanding of who You are and who I am.

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Although the Jews prayed sometimes standing and sometimes on their knees or prostrate, there is a certain haughtiness in the position taken by the Pharisee of this parable. This St. Luke seems to imply by contrasting with it the attitude of the publican. He also stands, but *afar off*, that is, near the entrance, and he does not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven. Moreover, his prayer reveals his interior humility as clearly as his position manifests an external abasement. He has no confidence in his own justice, but he trusts solely to the mercy of God, before whom he confesses his sinfulness and asks for pardon. The Pharisee's prayer, on the contrary, reveals his pride even more than does his exterior aspect. He begins, it is true, by praising God and rendering Him thanks, but only as a pretext for passing immediately to the praise of himself.

Far from reminding himself of his sins, the Pharisee enumerates his virtues and merits; and these relate to externals. He fasts, not once only as the Law prescribed, but twice in the week. He pays tithes, not only on all his revenues, but also on *mint, anise, and cummin*, that is, on insignificant products of the soil, which grow without cultivation. He has no favor to seek, no pardon to implore, he merely offers thanks; and even this good action seems only to remind him of his virtues, as all that he sees around him seems to remind him of his superiority over other men, who are, in his estimation, *robbers, dishonest, adulterers*. Unlike the publican, whose eyes are cast down in humble recognition of his guilt before God, the Pharisee looks about to see whether he is being observed. As he does so his glance falls upon the

publican, whom he roundly condemns. Surely this is intolerable pride—to find only virtues and no faults in oneself, to boast before God, and to accuse and condemn all others.

How are the Pharisee and the publican judged? Our Savior pronounced His verdict in these words: "*I tell you, this man went back to his home justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*" It is evident that Jesus intends the parable as a lesson in humility, especially with regard to our dealings with God. True humility of the heart, the consciousness of our sinfulness—these are sentiments that suit us best before God. They are our best means of succeeding with Him; for God inclines mercifully to the humble, but the proud heart He resists and condemns. Let us beg of Him to help us govern our pride, that constant obstacle to the success of our prayers. Like the Pharisee, we may have more than once flattered our self-love even in prayer, even before the altar. But God in His gracious mercy will pardon us if we ask Him; and with the aid of His grace we can overcome our vanity, which differs, perhaps, from the pride of the Pharisee only in being more carefully concealed.

"O God, who dost manifest Thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity; increase Thy mercy toward us, that we, seeking the way of Thy promises, may be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasures" (Roman Missal).

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*The Blessing of the Children*

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“Now they were bringing the babes also to him that he might touch them” (Lk. 18:15).

If the blessing of the children actually followed immediately the condemnation of divorce, as it does in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, it would seem that our Savior wished to add force to His denunciation of this evil by thus calling attention to its innocent victims.

Lord, teach me to imitate You in Your charitable selflessness.

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It was probably the mothers themselves who introduced their little ones to Jesus on this occasion, and it would seem likely also that the children were very young. They were not brought, therefore, to be instructed or for other like benefits, but their mothers wished them at least to have the happiness of receiving the Master's blessing: *that he might lay his hands on them and pray*. Rulers of synagogues and the rabbis were sometimes asked to bless children, and the imposition of hands as a sign of blessing goes far back in Jewish history. In Jesus these mothers saw a man of God, a divine Envoy. His holiness, power, and goodness were highly esteemed; and so they desired to procure for their little ones the temporal and spiritual favors particularly attached to a blessing which emanated from representatives of God, such as priests, holy men, doctors of the Law.

Perhaps it was because Jesus was indoors with His followers that these mothers with their children did not go directly to

Him, but first applied to the disciples, by whom they were impatiently chided. Why this conduct on the part of our Savior's Apostles (for undoubtedly the term "disciples" either means or includes the Apostles)? It may have been that the Master was weary, that He had need of rest, and so they wished to spare Him this new intrusion which, after all, was only a matter of a blessing. Perhaps the number of children was large and the disciples knew well that their Master would not stop with half—He would bless them all. In any case, we may observe here, although not for the first time, that the Apostles are the intermediaries between the people and the Savior. They permit or refuse access to Him; but on this occasion they acted contrary to His wishes. St. Mark says, *But when Jesus saw them, he was indignant.* His Apostles still did not understand His spirit or their role.

Gathering them together before Him, He said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God."* Then, when the children were brought in, *he put his arms about them,* St. Mark tells us, *and laying his hands upon them, he began to bless them.* Probably He did this for each child individually, despite the length of time such personal attention must have involved. How amiable is our Savior! To see a priest blessing a child is a lovely sight, but that Jesus, Priest and Doctor par excellence, that God Incarnate should condescend so tenderly and graciously to little children is, certainly, an extraordinary expression of divine benevolence. Twice only in the Gospel is there mention of our Savior's caresses, and in both instances they are given to little children.

If only I could think of this picture of You, O kind and merciful Jesus, blessing and embracing the little children, when I am tempted to impatience, as I fear I often am, by an ill-timed

visit or request! Would that I could really bear with my neighbor for one day in imitation of You and for love of You! Make me truly understand, dear Lord, that my duties and my virtues are not in the stars and clouds, but that being good means thinking and acting every day, wherever I am, toward whomever I meet, as You did and in union with You, however unloving and impatient I may be inclined to feel.

NOVEMBER 9

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### *The Rich Young Man*



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“And as he was going forth on his journey, a certain man running up fell upon his knees before him and asked him, ‘Good Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life?’” (Mk. 10:17)

Our Lord had just left the house where He had blessed the children, when a young man came running up to Him and knelt at His feet.

O Jesus, grant me that divine discontent which leads to sanctity.

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This young man knelt before Jesus out of reverence, but also to secure His attention. It was not customary to show such exceptional deference to the doctors of the Law, or to address them as reverentially as this youth does Jesus: “*Good Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life?*” Rarely did our Savior meet with anyone so docile and so completely absorbed in that which He primarily recommended, namely, the welfare of the soul. Yet there would seem to be a touch of exaggeration, a superficial quality in the young man’s enthu-

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siasm and, perhaps, a desire to flatter; at any rate, our Savior's answer appears somewhat stern: "*Why dost thou call me good? No one is good but God only.*" It is possible that this youth, inspired by a sincere but unstable enthusiasm, was asking guidance from Jesus only as from a good man, and that he was not thinking of God, who alone is essential Goodness, and who alone should have been the object of his aspirations. The words of Jesus, therefore, may have been designed to purify his intention and so add strength and firmness to his resolution. Perhaps, also, our Savior wished to draw from the young man an act of faith in His divinity. Had he said in return, "But art thou not the Son of God?" he might have been admitted further into the mystery, but he made no rejoinder.

The question as to the manner of arriving at salvation and eternal life, our Savior answered merely by referring the suppliant to the Ten Commandments, quoting the precepts of the second table of the Decalogue, all of which concern conduct toward one's neighbor. The youth asserted that he had kept all these prescriptions ever since childhood, implying that now he was seeking a higher perfection. He was not boasting, for our Savior, turning upon Him one of His penetrating glances, allowed a feeling of tenderness to move His Sacred Heart: *And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.* Then He revealed to him the evangelical counsels, saying, "*One thing is lacking to thee; go, sell whatever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*"

Voluntary poverty alone was expressly commanded here, but the call to celibacy was implied, and the invitation to intimate discipleship was also a summons to a more comprehensive obedience. Moreover, as He so often did, Jesus

sweetened the bitter prospect of exceptional sacrifice with the promise of an exceptional heavenly recompense. But the test was too severe. The young man's *face fell at the saying, and he went away sad, for he had great possessions*. It was hard to resist Jesus, but harder still to yield to Him. Jesus, saddened by this regrettable departure, and looking about Him as if to observe the impression it had left with the Apostles, said, "*With what difficulty will they who have riches enter the kingdom of God!*" The young man had advanced to the threshold of the kingdom, but his wealth prevented him from crossing it, and may even have cost him his salvation.

O Jesus, if this rich young man had really loved You, he would have been braver; but he loved himself — unwisely — since his self-love led him to prefer an earthly, perishable happiness to treasure in heaven and eternal glory. You have revealed to me also the secret of perfection. I know well that my service of You must be more than the avoiding of sin and its occasions. I am called to separate myself from all earthly possessions and desires so as to attach myself exclusively to You as Your disciple in the way of evangelical perfection.

NOVEMBER 10

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### *Reward of Evangelical Poverty*



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"Then Peter addressed him, saying, 'Behold, we have left all and followed thee; what then shall we have?'" (Mt. 19:27)

Our Savior had promised the rich young man treasure in heaven if he would give up all he possessed and become His disciple.

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Peter reminds our Lord that this is precisely what the Apostles had done.

Lord Jesus, help me so to live my religious life that I may be worthy of Your promises.

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After our Savior's warning about the danger of riches, gloom fell upon the Apostles. They were depressed by the thought that love of his wealth could be so fatal an obstacle even to a man of good will in other respects. Peter, as was his custom, took the initiative. His exclamation was probably as much a profession of fidelity and an attempt to console his Master for the defection of the rich young man as it was a desire for reassurance about his reward. Our Savior's reply united the promise of magnificent recompense with the condition upon which it would be granted: "*Amen I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, who shall not receive now in the present time a hundredfold as much, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands—along with persecutions, and in the age to come life everlasting.*"

The basic condition is total renunciation, as Jesus had asked it of the rich young man. House, goods, family must be left behind and, in addition, the renouncement must be made for Jesus and with an apostle's purpose, namely, to follow Jesus, to attach oneself to Him, and to share in His work for the kingdom of God and the Gospel. The reward is twofold, being effective both in time and eternity. The earthly recompense is designated as *much more in the present time* and also as *a hundredfold as much*; this latter expression being an Oriental phrase signifying overflowing abundance. The hundredfold of our Savior's promise surely



means pre-eminently spiritual blessings: interior liberty, security, joy, graces of filial confidence in God, of prayer, of facility in acting from a pure intention; but purely temporal advantages are also included. Upon taking up the apostolic life and attaching himself exclusively to Jesus, the disciple enters into a new and larger family, whose temporal goods are held in common. There he finds consolation, direction, support, and the joys of the common life.

But all these blessings are enjoyed, as our Savior says, *along with persecutions*, that is, in spite of persecutions, in spite of all the interior and exterior sacrifices which are never wanting to the Church militant and especially to the apostolic follower of Jesus Christ. The heavenly reward promised by Jesus is itself a double recompense. There is the assurance, first, of possessing heaven and eternal life and, second, of a special degree in heaven of honor, power, and joy. This beautiful and thrilling instruction of our Savior completes and motivates His exhortation to the rich young man, which had seemed so harsh and difficult. It is also a profound and splendid answer to Peter's question. What an exchange it implied for Peter! In return for the boat he had left to follow Jesus, he was to receive the divine and eternal bark of the Church.

“O Sovereign Majesty, absolute Master of all that exists, relying upon the assistance of Your grace, although no one is more unworthy of it than I, I offer myself to You entirely and without reserve. All that I am, all that I possess, I submit gladly to Your most holy will. I protest at the feet of Your supreme Majesty, in the presence of Your Blessed Mother and of all the heavenly court, that it is my intention, my desire, my firm and unalterable determination to follow You as closely as is possible for me and in the measure required

by Your glory and my own salvation" (from a prayer by St. Ignatius Loyola).

NOVEMBER 11

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### *The Laborers in the Vineyard*



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"Now when they of the eleventh hour came, they received each a denarius" (Mt. 20:9).

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, our Savior teaches us that all the elect, without reference to degrees of individual glory, receive the denarius of the Beatific Vision; and, also, that it is never too late to answer the call of grace.

O Jesus, grant me the strength to correspond fully with all Your graces and especially with that of final perseverance.

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The vineyard in the parable may represent either the Church or the duties of our state. The owner is God Himself. The laborers are those whom He calls to His service. The day of toil is the duration of the centuries for humanity in general or the duration of life for each individual; the denarius represents eternal salvation. The parable is framed by the maxim with which our Savior concluded His preceding instruction, namely, "*But many who are first now will be last, and many who are last now will be first,*" and the similar thought with which He closed the parable itself: "*Even so the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen.*"

The words "*For many are called, but few are chosen,*" contain the principal lesson of the parable. *Many are called*

to the ordinary degree of grace which will entitle them to their heavenly reward if they co-operate with it as faithfully as they can. *Few are chosen* for the exceptional and extraordinary gifts of grace that will enable them to accomplish in a short time as much or more than others who have worked harder and longer. That is to say, the measure of our reward in the kingdom of heaven will not depend solely on the difficulty of the work we have done, nor the length of service, nor the amount we have accomplished. It will depend primarily and above all on the measure of grace bestowed on each one and the fidelity of each in co-operating with it. The decisive factor in the matter is the interior grace and the recipient's response to it; but the apportionment of grace, to some souls more, to others less, is solely dependent upon the divine Will and Benevolence.

In all cases, however, heaven is granted only as a recompense. No one will receive it who does not respond to the call of the Master and who does not work. Our part in earning the *denarius* is to co-operate, according to our strength, with the help given us, making the best use of every faculty, gift, and opportunity we have to promote the glory of God. But it is only divine grace that imparts a supernatural character to our efforts and so renders them worthy of the eternal reward. If we fully grasped this truth, that all supernatural value in what we do depends upon the grace of God, a deep humility, and the realization of our own nothingness would pervade all our actions. Then we would never overrate our individual efforts nor regard ourselves as anything else but, at best, *unprofitable servants*. On the other hand, if we would constantly bear in mind that the day of toil is quickly over and the rewards of heaven eternal, with what zeal and eagerness we should strive to

co-operate with every grace given us, that we may not lose what we have looked for, but may receive a full reward!

“May Thy faithful people, O Lord, be strengthened by Thy gifts; that by partaking of them they may continue to seek after them, and by seeking them, constantly partake of them” (Roman Missal).

NOVEMBER 12

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### *The Prayer of Martha and Mary*



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“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that through it the Son of God may be glorified” (Jn. 11:4).

While our Savior was still engaged in His ministry in Perea, east of the Jordan, a messenger came from Bethany, near Jerusalem, from the sisters of Lazarus, saying that their brother was seriously ill.

Divine Savior, grant that I may grow in the knowledge and love of Your sacred humanity.

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What prayer, for such it was, could be more delicate, humble, and confident than the message sent by the sisters of Lazarus to Jesus: “*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick*”? They merely inform Him of their brother’s illness and leave the rest to Him. “It is enough that thou know,” says St. Augustine, “for thou dost not love and leave it at that.” Jesus replied, and the messenger surely reported His words in Bethany, “*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that through it the Son of God may be glorified.*” Then He remained two days more in the place

where He had received the message, although He knew that Lazarus had died on the very day they had sent word to Him of his illness. Why this delay, when in other circumstances Jesus showed so much alacrity in going to the aid of those who appealed to Him? It was necessary for the glory of God and the glorification of the Savior that Lazarus die; furthermore, Jesus did not wish to interrupt His apostolic labors for reasons of a private nature. And in the end the delay would be for both Lazarus and his sisters the occasion of great blessings. In addition, it gave Martha and Mary the opportunity of practicing patience and confidence.

Moreover, that our Savior finally did set out for Judea was a new and striking proof of His affection for Lazarus and his sisters. When He announced His intention to the disciples, they became greatly alarmed and reminded Jesus that only recently, at the Feast of the Dedication, the Jews had attempted to stone Him. Our Savior reassured them by a short parable. A traveler, He told them, does not meet danger as long as he journeys in the daytime; and so it was with Him. The night of His passion had not yet come; it was still day and He could work. Yet, it was true that He was going to His death; as Thomas said to the others, more, perhaps, with the hope of strengthening himself than of heartening them. "*Let us also go,*" he said, "*that we may die with him.*" The miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead became in reality a proximate cause of the death of Jesus. He was well aware of this eventuality, yet He set out to perform the miracle. It would be worked almost at the gates of the Holy City and in favor of a rich and respected family. An influential and well-known man would be its central figure. But this man must first die and be buried so that the miracle might be both striking and

incontestable. The purpose of its accomplishment is evident. By it God would be glorified, the Savior would be clearly revealed as the Messias, and the disciples would be confirmed in their faith.

Lord Jesus, grant me a deeper trust in Your wise and paternal love, which permits the trial, but always for my good. How sweet it is to reflect that nothing is hidden from You, that we are always in Your sight as well as in Your love! It was on our account as well as for Lazarus that You returned to Bethany. Help me to make a better return than in the past for Your devoted, self-immolating love of me.

NOVEMBER 13

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### *Our Savior's Arrival at Bethany*



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“Jesus therefore came and found him already four days in the tomb” (Jn. 11:17).

The events which occurred in Bethany of Judea immediately before Lazarus was raised from the dead form the proximate preparation for the miracle and add further proof of the reality of our Savior's sacred humanity.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of entering sincerely into the joys and sorrows of others.

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The whole state of affairs which met Jesus upon His arrival at the house of Lazarus served to prove beyond a doubt that Lazarus was really dead. He had been in the grave for four days; the tomb was well closed; and when our Savior directed that it be opened, Martha protested,

saying that the corpse would be already decayed. Moreover, a large number of Jews, who had come from Jerusalem to make their visits of condolence, accompanied Mary into the presence of Jesus, who went with them to the tomb. Thus they became eyewitnesses of the resurrection, which would doubtless have been denied if only the disciples and the two sisters of Lazarus had been present. In this way, the reality of the miracle, the material fact, was established beyond question. Our Savior had taken care that this should be the case.

There was also a divine compassionate purpose in the wonderful scene when Mary, accompanied, no doubt, by Martha, threw herself weeping at the feet of Jesus. The Jews who had followed them into the presence of Jesus were also in tears. All was sorrow and desolation around the Savior, their only hope. Jesus Himself was deeply moved. *He groaned in spirit and was troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." And Jesus wept.* O divine compassion of the heart of Jesus, willing once again to feel with us our human sorrow! Jesus remained in the midst of those who grieved for Lazarus and wept with them.

These tears of our Savior become still more precious when we think of the manner in which He wept. In our case, sensible impressions and tears are not voluntary; they are independent of our will. But for our Savior such emotions were entirely voluntary, wholly subject to His will. Nothing touched His sensibilities except that which He willed and at the time and in the manner He willed. On this occasion, He saw that the grief of the sisters and friends of Lazarus was just, reasonable, and holy. He permitted that this sorrow act upon His own feelings in so lively and intimate

a manner that they manifested themselves externally by His tears. The Jews who were present, observing our Savior's grief, said, "See how he loved him." But others said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have caused that this man should not die?"

O precious tears of Jesus, precious not only for Lazarus and his family, but also for us! You weep, O Jesus, not only over our sins, but for our temporal miseries as well. How generous and tender, how truly human is Your love. Yes, in all reality, *the Word was made flesh.*

NOVEMBER 14

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### *Martha's Profession of Faith*



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"I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25).

In His conversation with Martha just prior to the raising of Lazarus, Jesus prepared for the acceptance of the miracle as proof of His mission and divinity.

St. Martha and St. Mary, obtain for me your unfaltering confidence in Jesus.

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Martha, the prudent mistress of the house, first came to our Savior alone; after their interview she went quietly to send Mary to Him in order not to leave Jesus alone in the somewhat hostile company of the Jews. In her conversation with Jesus, Martha showed that she had lost none of her faith and trust in His affection and power. Even now, she implied, He could come to their aid, at least by praying to God. But this was not enough for our Savior. Martha's



faith must be deepened. She must come to believe more than that her brother would rise again at the general resurrection of the dead, or that He could come to life again, merely because Jesus would pray to His heavenly Father. Martha must accept the truth that He, Jesus, who was then speaking with her, was Himself the plenitude of divine life; that He was truly God and could, therefore, restore the dead to life by His own power and whenever He wished. This truth was the *glory of God* which the miracle was to make manifest.

This was the significance of our Savior's wonderful words: "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die. Dost thou believe this?*" This faith Jesus required of Martha as the condition for His working the miracle. Later, at the tomb, Martha seemed to hesitate, knowing as she did that the corpse of her brother had already begun to decompose. But she remembered the condition laid down by our Savior, and she recalled and renewed her own magnificent profession of faith, worthy of St. Peter himself, which she had made in reply: "*Yes, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who hast come into the world.*" Mary, the sister of Martha, seems to have possessed this faith already and in full, for Jesus asked no other preparation from her, nor any new dispositions of soul. Thus were the sisters of Lazarus permitted by Jesus to co-operate in the miracle and to merit it.

St. Martha and St. Mary, you show me in this mystery how to merit the love of Jesus and His blessings. Your confidence in Him was not shaken by the disappointment you must have felt when the messenger returned alone, and when the reply of Jesus, so full of hope, was so cruelly belied by fact. I,

too, must believe in Jesus and hope in Him against all hope. I must devote myself to Him and serve Him with all my heart. Obtain for me the grace of living daily in this faith and devotedness.

NOVEMBER 15

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### *The Raising of Lazarus*



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“Lazarus, come forth” (Jn. 11:44).

The stone that was laid over the entrance of Lazarus’ tomb having been lifted away, Jesus raised His eyes to heaven in prayer to His Father; then in a loud tone of command He summoned the dead man from his grave.

Divine Redeemer, grant that my summons from the grave may be a call to everlasting life **with You**.

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Our Savior’s preliminary prayer to His Father, “*Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me,*” was uttered in a tone for all to hear. The sense of this solemn prayer is not that our Savior would work this miracle, as the saints do, by the efficacy of His intercession with God, rather than by virtue of His divinity; for He immediately added that He knew His Father heard Him always. This was like saying that He possessed essentially in Himself the power to work miracles. The purpose of the prayer was rather to thank the Father for giving Him the occasion of accomplishing for His glory and for the salvation of the Jews so striking a prodigy. It was an expression of gratitude offered to the Father by the God-Man from the point of view of His

human nature, which He had received from the Father and which was ever in submission to Him. Jesus then went on to indicate the purpose of the miracle, namely, that those present might believe that God had sent Him. The formal intention of our Savior in raising Lazarus from the dead, therefore, was to prove the divinity of His mission. Never before had our Savior appealed so explicitly and, as it were, in advance, to His miraculous power as testimony to His identity as the Messias.

Then the miracle was performed. The resurrection of Lazarus differs from other miracles of this kind in that Lazarus was brought back to life after his corpse had already begun to decompose. Jesus did not enter the tomb. He stood outside and called in a loud tone of command: "*Lazarus, come forth!*" This was done to show that His summons was the material instrument of His divine power. Moreover — a truly marvelous circumstance and like a second miracle — Lazarus did not only return to life. He arose, and the stupefied spectators saw him emerging from what seems to have been a subterranean cavern without an antechamber. Enveloped as he was in burial wrappings and shroud, it was naturally impossible for him to walk; and so Jesus said simply, "*Unbind him and let him go.*"

We may readily imagine the immediate effects of this miracle — the mingled feelings of fear and joy in the hearts of the witnesses, the happiness of the Apostles in the glory of their Master, the adoration and gratitude of Lazarus and his sisters. This miracle marks the peak, as it were, of the revelation which Jesus made of Himself through miracles. By reason of the circumstances the "glory of God" was most signally manifested in the raising of Lazarus. The past and the present meet in this incident. Previous miracles, specifi-

cally the cure of the man born blind, serve as its basis and support (“*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that this man should not die?*”). The future, with His death and His triumph, had here its point of departure.

O Jesus, my Savior, nothing can resist Your all-powerful love. It can help us when all else fails; even beyond the grave it is obeyed. And this living Heart of Yours is ever in our midst, in the Sacrament of the Altar. You have the same tenderness and affection for us as You had for Lazarus. What You did for him You will one day do for each of us. Your voice will call us forth from the grave to a glorious life. Grant me the happiness of being throughout eternity a living witness to Your power and love.

NOVEMBER 16

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### *The Conspiracy of the Sanhedrin*



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“Many therefore of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things that Jesus had done” (Jn. 11:45, 46).

Some of the Jews who had been eyewitnesses of the miracle went to inform the Pharisees of it, probably out of malice; but perhaps merely to forestall any unpleasantness which their presence at Bethany on this occasion might draw upon themselves.

Divine Savior, perfect in me the gift of holy fear.

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The Jews had once asked our Savior for *a sign from heaven*. Now He had given it to them. It was a great sign,

the raising of Lazarus from the dead. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Feast of the Palms would be the testimonial of the people's gratitude for this miracle, but the hatred and fury of His enemies were aggravated by it to their highest pitch. His passion and death was a natural counterstroke. It was too much for the Pharisees to tolerate that Lazarus, restored to life at the very gates of Jerusalem, should be a living testimony to the words Jesus had spoken to the Jews one day in the Temple: "*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will*"; and again, "*Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is here, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live. For as the Father has life in himself, even so he has given to the Son also to have life in himself.*" And, as Abraham had predicted in our Savior's parable, Lazarus really had returned to testify to his brethren; but his brethren did not believe him, and they desired to do away with this incontestable witness to the divinity of Jesus, as well as with Jesus Himself.

It was clearly impossible to deny the miracle. Now was the time, therefore, to adopt some decisive plan against Jesus. The Pharisees went into private conference with the chief priests. "*What are we doing?*" they said. "*For this man is working many signs. If we let him alone as he is, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.*" Knowingly, they imputed to the Savior their own erroneous ideas on the kingdom of the Messiah and shielded themselves by the pretext of safeguarding the people's interests. It would seem, however, that they were not all in accord. Perhaps the two friends of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, pointed out the absurdity of the charge, arguing that to work a

miracle was not a crime; rather, they should either put faith in it or examine it. Finally, Caiphas, apparently irritated at this opposition, said bluntly, "*You know nothing at all.*" Then, with the basest hypocrisy, he demanded the death of Jesus under the pretext of national danger: "*It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, instead of the whole nation perishing.*" Caiphas obtained the solution he desired. It was decided that Jesus should die. But what Caiphas in diabolical malice judged expedient, God also judged best in His most holy and merciful plan, as St. John remarks: *This, however, he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was to die for the nation; and not only for the nation, but that he might gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad.* For Caiphas the *nation* was the Jews, but for God it was the whole human race.

O Jesus, how inscrutable is the obstinacy of the human heart! The resurrection of Lazarus was one of the last graces You offered Jerusalem, and by their resistance the Pharisees became hardened in evil. Grant, O divine Savior, that I may ever live in holy fear of abusing Your divine patience.

NOVEMBER 17

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### *Third Prediction of the Passion*



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"But Jesus taking to himself the Twelve said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that have been written through the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished'" (Lk. 18:31).

The time of this third solemn prediction of the Passion is the final days before the celebration of our Savior's last Pasch, as He and His Apostles are on their way to Jerusalem.

Divine Master, teach me how to follow You on the path of suffering.

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With courageous determination Jesus had been walking ahead of His disciples. They followed hesitantly because He was going to Jerusalem and, says St. Mark, they were *in dismay*. The mere prospect of returning to Jerusalem made their hearts heavy with somber thoughts and presentiments; yet they continued to follow. But at one point in the journey our Savior evidently rejoined the group and took His Apostles, St. Matthew tells us, *apart by themselves*. Only they were to hear His final explicit prediction of the passion, which seems more like history than prophecy: "*For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and scourged and spit upon; and after they have scourged him, they will put him to death; and on the third day he will rise again.*"

What was our Savior's intention in making this prediction which forms, as it were, an outline of the passion and its ignominious end? He wished, first, to prepare the Apostles again for the blow that was so soon to fall. He also desired to strengthen and comfort them; this is why He added that His sufferings were to be those which had been *written through the prophets concerning the Son of Man*, and that He would rise again on the third day. Further, He was again endeavoring to bring them to a proper view of the passion. They were not to see in it the ruin of all His designs, nor an unexpected catastrophe, but an eternal and divine plan.

Again, however, the Apostles failed to grasp our Savior's meaning. His words were clear enough, but they could not

bring themselves to believe that these sufferings and this shameful death could apply to their Master. They had seen such marvelous proofs of His power that such a death, or simply death itself, seemed to them an impossibility for Him. Perhaps they took our Savior's words on this occasion in the figurative and parabolic sense which by now they were accustomed to expect from Him, and, therefore, did not grasp their literal force. In any case, it is clear that the mystery of the cross was still hidden from them; nor was it to be revealed until the descent of the Holy Spirit.

As for our Savior's own feelings, each step that He took in returning to Jerusalem must naturally have increased His interior anguish. Each step brought Him nearer to the ignominious conclusion of His public life. All about Him nature was being renewed, and all hearts were rejoicing in anticipation of the Paschal feast, the caravans of pilgrims expressing their gladness in songs of joy. But the mind of Jesus was filled with thoughts of His death; and, indeed, all that was going on about Him was, in reality, part of the preparation for His great sacrifice, in which the true Paschal Lamb would be immolated for the sins of the world.

O divine Savior, like the Apostles, we contemplate the mystery of the cross again and again, but so few of us understand. We honor Your passion exteriorly, but we are unwilling to enter into fellowship with Your humiliations and pain. When there is question of the necessity of suffering we, too, have eyes and see not and ears and hear not. Open, O Jesus, the eyes and ears of our hearts!



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*Ambition of the Mother of James and John*

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“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons; and worshipping, she made a request of him. He said to her, ‘What dost thou want?’ She said to him, ‘Command that these my two sons may sit, one at thy right hand and one at thy left hand, in thy kingdom’” (Mt. 20:20–21).

The mother of James and John accosted our Lord probably at the urging of her sons. Their request was doubtless prompted by our Savior’s words on the glorious recompense especially reserved for the Apostles, by the mention of His resurrection, and also by their own erroneous notions regarding the imminence and nature of the “kingdom.”

Lord Jesus, grant me a supernatural eagerness to attain the only worthy goal for my ambition — a share in Your cross.

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Salome, the mother of James and John, was one of the holy women who followed after Jesus in order to minister to His needs. Perhaps she was a widow; at any rate, we know that she had generously given up both her sons to Jesus and they, by their devotedness and zeal, merited to be in the front rank of the Apostles. Her prayer, moreover, was inspired by a lively faith in Jesus, and it was offered with touching simplicity and confidence. But it was imperfect because it wrongly anticipated a temporal kingdom of the Messiah and requested a special reward. Finally, Salome and her sons expected to obtain the reward they sought for the mere asking. They themselves, however, seem to have felt they were broaching a delicate matter, for they wished our

Savior to promise the favor in advance, and it would seem that they came to Him secretly to present their petition.

Jesus, however, had compassion on their blindness. Knowing as He did that at His right and left a short time hence would hang the two thieves dying in anguish on the cross, He said quietly, "*You do not know what you are asking for.*" Then He openly alluded to His passion and death to show that prayer was not enough, that they must also share with Him the bitter suffering of His passion. "*Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink,*" He asked them. "*We can,*" answered the sons of Zebedee courageously and also sincerely as they later proved. Then our Savior joyfully showed them in prophecy that they would indeed drink of His chalice and be honored by participation in His cross; but as for the recompense they desired, even death for His sake would not merit it for them, if they were not destined for such honor by the eternal decree of the Father. Thus the request of the sons of Zebedee was formally turned aside without explicit acceptance or rejection, for the secret providence of the Father was not to be disclosed. This was done, moreover, with a mildness and sweetness all the more admirable in that our Savior was at this moment thinking least of the kingdom and of His glory. His mind and soul were filled with the grave and somber thought of His passion; and so the ill-advised request of James and John must have had a particularly jarring effect upon Him.

When the other Apostles, who were themselves also eager for the first places in the kingdom of the Messias, which they too conceived of erroneously, heard of this incident, they showed their jealousy in murmuring and reproaches against the two brothers. Envy and ambition being the cause of their indignation, they fell into the same fault as James

and John. And so our Savior repeated again the lesson already taught so many times: that in His kingdom the highest rank is reserved for the humblest souls; that the spirit of His kingdom is directly opposed to the haughty imperiousness of earthly empires; that he who is first in the Church must be the servant of all "*even as the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

O divine Master, Your true disciples know no other sovereignty than that of abnegation and self-sacrifice, even unto death. The reward they ask of You is the honor of being associated with You on the cross, of being crucified beside You. Free me, divine Savior, from all darkness of mind and from all misunderstanding of what should be the true goal of my ambition. Let me sincerely aspire only to a share in the glory of Your holy cross.

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NOVEMBER 19

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### *The Blind Man at Jericho*



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"Now it came to pass as he drew near to Jericho, that a certain blind man was sitting by the wayside, begging" (Lk. 18:35).

As Jesus was entering the frontier city of Jericho, on His way to Jerusalem for His last celebration of the Pasch, a blind man called to Him for a cure.

Lord Jesus, strengthen my desire for holiness.

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*A certain blind man*, St. Luke tells us, was begging at the side of the road, along which our Savior was passing. The

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afflicted of Palestine lived mainly on alms, and the pilgrimages to the Holy City were their harvest time. Hearing an unusual commotion, the blind man asked the reason and was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. This name was by now well known throughout his district. Filled with hope, the blind beggar shouted with all his might, so as to be heard over the noise of the crowds, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Vainly they tried to silence him, out of annoyance, perhaps, or from disapproval that this Messianic title should be given to Jesus; or, perhaps, through fear of the Pharisees. But, heedless of reproof, the blind man called out still more insistently, "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" *Then Jesus stopped, continues St. Luke, and commanded that he should be brought to him. And when he drew near, he asked him, saying, "What wouldst thou have me do for thee?" And he said, "Lord, that I may see." And Jesus said to him, "Receive thy sight, thy faith has saved thee." And at once he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God.*

St. Luke places the cure of the blind man of Jericho immediately after his account of our Savior's third prediction of His passion. He may have wished to call attention to the Apostles' dullness of perception by associating it in this way with physical blindness. At all events we may learn from this blind beggar how we are to ask for and to receive spiritual enlightenment. First of all, he earnestly desired to see. Jesus said, "*If any man wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.*" *If any man wishes:* Jesus constrains no one. The blind man cried out to our Savior again and again, for fear that if he missed this opportunity he should not have another. Do we avail ourselves of the daily opportunities that are offered us for advancement in divine love? Then the blind man, having received his sight, followed Jesus,

giving glory to God. Let us use solely for the divine glory all natural and supernatural gifts He bestows upon us.

O Jesus, how brilliantly this episode reveals once again Your goodness as well as Your power! You were not so taken up with the thoughts of Your imminent passion and death that Your Sacred Heart did not hear and respond to the cry of this afflicted man. You stopped and asked that he be brought to You; then, with compassionate goodness and truly royal liberality, You asked what he wished You to do for him. O Jesus, with the blind man and with all his eager desire, my soul cries out to You, "*Lord, that I may see.*"

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NOVEMBER 20

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### *Jesus and Zacheus*



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"And he entered and was passing through Jericho. And behold there was a man named Zacheus" (Lk. 19:1).

Jericho was a busy center of trade and the residence of numerous agents of the imperial treasury. Apparently our Savior only passed through the city and did not stop to exercise His ministry there; it was during His passage that the episode of Zacheus took place.

Divine Master, help me not to miss a single one of the opportunities You give me of growing in Your love.

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Zacheus appears to have been an official in charge of the tax collectors at Jericho. He had certainly already heard of the wisdom, goodness, and power of Jesus; and now, learning that He was passing through the city, Zacheus determined

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to satisfy his desire of looking upon the face of the Master. In his humility he chose the naïve expedient of climbing into one of the sycamore trees which grew along the road where Jesus was to pass. Being short of stature he could not have seen our Savior from the crowd; and so, leading publican and rich man though he was, he joined many others, no doubt, of the young people, children, and humbler folk, in viewing the Master's passage from the low, full branches of a sycamore tree.

The simplicity and humility of Zacheus were even more fully revealed when Jesus invited Himself—a unique favor—to his house. Zacheus was a stranger to Jesus and yet, looking up at him in the sycamore tree, He addressed him like an old acquaintance: "*Zacheus, make haste and come down; for I must stay in thy house today.*" Zacheus nimbly leaped down and joyfully hurried away to make preparations for receiving so distinguished a guest. The crowd, however, was scandalized that a sinner, a tax collector in the service of Rome, rather than a Levite or one of the nobility of Jericho, should have the honor of giving hospitality to the Master. But Jesus, unperturbed, followed after Zacheus. And he, on his part, even before our Savior had reclined at his table, in an excess of gladness proclaimed his gratitude for this gracious visit: "*Behold, Lord, I give one half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.*" Zacheus would cheerfully despoil himself of his fortune; he was ready, if called upon, to give himself also to the Savior as his fellow publican, Matthew, had done; and Jesus now declared as He had formerly done at the calling of Matthew, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*"

The reward of Zacheus' sincerity and generosity was the

inestimable grace of faith and salvation granted to him and his whole family. "Today," said our Savior, "salvation has come to this house." According to one tradition, Zacheus later became Bishop of Caesarea. In his story we observe as its most striking feature the powerful but hidden action of grace. The initial desire of Zacheus to see Jesus was not ordinary curiosity, but the first stirrings of the gift of faith. This grace accepted was followed by another which enabled Zacheus to make an act of renunciation of all that would be at variance with his faith; then, as a further consequence, his faith itself became complete and solid, transforming the whole man.

O my divine Savior, grant me a spirit of watchfulness, recollection, and docility, that I may be always alert to profit by Your lights and attractions; and thus, like Zacheus, prepare myself for new favors. Help me to live habitually in Your holy presence and to mortify my senses, so that whatever offers the least distraction may have no further claim upon me. Let my fidelity obtain for me courage to apply the sole remedy: a clean break, when pleasures, friends, ambition, comforts are felt to draw me in the slightest degree away from You.

NOVEMBER 21

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*The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 878)

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*Self-Immolation*

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“Amen, amen I say to you, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit” (Jn. 12:24, 25).

These words, which were among the last our Savior spoke to His people, express an essential obligation of the religious state. Religious profession obliges us to mortify the desires of the flesh and dedicate all our faculties entirely to the service of God in accordance with our vows.

Lord Jesus, deliver me from the temptation of spiritual cowardice.

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Through the divine goodness and mercy, grace is freely bestowed upon us, so that nature with its tendencies to evil may be successfully resisted. But without continual self-renouncement we cannot profit by the grace we receive and, consequently, are unable to win the victory over nature. Between God and the soul there is a continual alternation of graces proffered and sacrifices asked. At the moment in which we stop doing violence to self-love, however, the reciprocal flow of offering and response ceases.

“One thing,” says the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, “turns many souls away from spiritual progress and from a generous resolution to amend: fear of the difficulty or labor of the struggle.” In moments of fervor we sincerely make courageous plans to correct our faults and to strive resolutely for religious perfection, but the thought of the mortification of the senses that is required for self-conquest and of the necessity for strict and continuing vigilance over ourselves



makes us lose heart and draw back. This fear of self-denial not only prevents us from amending our lives, but it is fatal to the acquisition of solid virtue. Virtue is, in reality, the energy of the soul applied to good, and this spiritual vigor is maintained and carried to new heights only by the spirit of sacrifice; on the other hand, growth in virtue itself stimulates and nourishes, in turn, the spirit of sacrifice. Our nature, which is always in search of ease and repose, furthermore, can be balked of its desires only by the tireless resistance of a habit of self-sacrifice.

According to St. Luke's account, our Savior concluded the instruction on Christian renunciation as a condition for discipleship by pointing out the necessity of the spirit of sacrifice in the words: "*Salt is good; but if even the salt loses its strength, what shall it be seasoned with? It is fit neither for the land nor for the manure heap, but must be thrown out.*" On several occasions Jesus applied the figure of salt to supernatural truths, and here again He used it to illustrate an important teaching. The lukewarm Christian, the tepid religious, becomes worse than useless when he has lost the spiritual energy which maintains fervor in the practice of renunciation and sacrifice. We are an acceptable sacrifice to God only as long as we are seasoned with salt, that is, with the spirit and virtue of our selfless divine Master.

O Jesus, You daily immolate Yourself on thousands of altars and yet You remain continuously as Victim under the sacred species. Fill me with Your spirit of sacrifice and self-denial. Take from me the sloth and faintheartedness which have already caused me to lose the full grace and glory of that laborious, self-renouncing life which I, with the help of Your grace, have chosen. Grant me energy of soul to sacrifice every earthly desire and to conquer myself in all that displeases

You. May I now at last profit fully by Your many graces, correct my faults, and labor with firm resolution and good will for religious perfection!

NOVEMBER 23

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### *The Marriage Feast*



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“Now the king went in to see the guests, and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment” (Mt. 22:11).

On the second Sunday after Pentecost the Church gave us as the Gospel reading St. Luke’s version of the parable of the marriage feast given by a king for his son. The parallel text of St. Matthew adds a new detail, the guest who was not properly attired for the feast.

“O good Jesus, look down with a propitious eye upon my poor soul destitute of all ornaments of virtue, and clothe her with the wedding garment.”

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Our Savior shows us the king entering the banquet hall to see his guests. There he finds a man who is not wearing a wedding garment. This circumstance implies a want of proper respect and gratitude. The guest concerned had apparently not even taken the trouble to put on the appropriate garment which, according to custom in the East, was furnished their guests by distinguished hosts who were entertaining formally. And so the king, justly angered, says to this guest, “*Friend, how didst thou come in here without a wedding garment?*” There is no reply; the guest is speechless, for he is clearly at fault. Then the king, without more

ado gives the order: "*Bind his hands and feet and cast him forth into the darkness outside, where there will be the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth.*"

What does Jesus wish us to understand by this marriage feast? Pope St. Gregory tells us that it symbolizes the marriage which God the Father made for His royal Son when He united to Christ His holy Church through the mystery of the Incarnation. The nuptial robe is the image of sanctifying grace, that is to say, of holiness and inward union with the Son of God by a life of faith *which works through charity*. The name of "Christian" may entitle us to a place among the guests at the marriage feast of the King's Son, but it is necessary also to be clad in the rich garment of virtues and of graces faithfully and fruitfully received. Nothing escapes the eye of the great King. The guest who is not wearing the wedding garment is immediately singled out and summarily punished.

We may live our whole lives in the company of souls who are dear to God, we may live in a religious community that is composed of saints, but at the end God will separate the tepid from the fervent, that is to say, those who have lived their religious life in the sincere and efficacious good will to reach the perfection and the holiness they have pledged themselves to strive for. The silence of the wedding guest in the parable is also a warning for us. What would we reply to the great King if He should say to us, "Why have you entered into eternity without first putting your affairs in order, without doing penance for your sins, without making sure that you have done all that lies in your power to grow in my grace and my friendship?"

I acknowledge, O my God, that by my selfish rejection of Your inspirations and by my abuse of Your grace, I have rendered

myself worthy of Your reproach. Your abundant help has never been wanting to me; You have not been deterred by my ingratitude, but again and again You favor me interiorly with Your gentle urging. It is self-love and attachment to the false goods of this world that impede my inward union with You. Help me at last to break these ties once and for all; at this moment and for always, O good and merciful God, make me Yours in singlehearted love and fidelity.

NOVEMBER 24

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### *Tribute to Caesar*



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“Tell us, therefore, what dost thou think: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” (Mt. 22:17.)

Affecting a scruple of conscience, the enemies of Jesus attempted to entrap Him by a cunningly devised question. There seemed to be no escape from the snare. An affirmative answer would appear to sanction subjection to a pagan ruler and an answer in the negative would be equally disastrous, since Jesus would seem thereby to approve of insubordination and revolt.

Divine Master, let the sole motive of my obedience to human authority be to serve You in obeying men.

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The answer of Jesus to the alleged case of conscience submitted to Him by the Herodians and the agents of the Pharisees consisted of three parts. First, He laid bare their evil intentions: “*Why do you test me, you hypocrites?*” They had praised His love for truth, and so now He gave them a new proof of it at their expense. Second, He evaded the trap set for Him in a quite unexpected manner. Upon His

request they handed to Him the coin of the tribute, bearing the image with his name and titles of the then reigning Caesar, Tiberius. "*Whose are this image and the inscription?*" asked Jesus. "*Caesar's*" was the reply. In accepting these coins and using them His questioners themselves were showing that in practice they recognized the authority of Caesar; therefore, our Savior drew the valid and profound inference that both astounded and disconcerted His listeners: "*Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*"

God and Caesar, not God or Caesar! Here Jesus established the great law of the legitimacy of the temporal power and the spiritual power in their respective spheres. We can and we must obey both, as long as human authority does not encroach upon the rights of God. In this magnificent teaching which was His divinely calm and generous response to malice and perfidy, Jesus summarized all the duties of man, whose end is to serve God, but to do this while living in the society of his fellow men. Our Savior did not know Tiberius personally, or any of the Caesars of this world; He knew only that temporal rulers are invested with an authority that must be respected, because it ultimately derives from God. The reason that men are to be subject to Caesar is that Caesar himself is subject to God.

St. Hilary of Poitiers comments upon this incident as follows: "O answer filled with miraculous power! O perfect solution of this heavenly reply! He so moderated all things between a contempt of the world and the disrespect that would have been offered to Caesar, that He freed minds devoted to God from all worry and human obligation in decreeing that only the things which were Caesar's must be rendered to him. For if nothing of Caesar's remains in

our possession, we shall not be bound by the obligation of rendering to him what is his. . . . On the other hand, we are obliged to render to God the things that are His: our body, our soul, our will; for we have these things both in their development and in their perfection from God. Consequently, it is right that they be given up completely to Him to whom they are due both in their origin and in their perfection.”

O my God, through the grace of my religious vocation, I have already left to the world all that belongs to the world, and I gladly surrender to You that which is Yours, namely, all that I have and all that I am. Let not the affections of my heart seek again the goods of this earth, which I have given up forever by my vows.

*Only in God be at rest, my soul, for from him comes my hope. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed. With God is my safety and my glory, he is the rock of my strength; my refuge is in God.*

NOVEMBER 25

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### *The Great Commandment*



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“But the Pharisees, hearing that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered together. And one of them, a doctor of the Law, putting him to the test, asked him, ‘Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?’” (Mt. 22:34-36.)

Our Savior’s questioner on this occasion appears to have been a man of good will and a seeker after truth. Yet, the gathering of the Pharisees after our Savior’s triumph over the Sadducees and the fact that this man acted, in a manner, as their delegate would imply more than mere curiosity to hear how Jesus

would handle the question. St. Matthew tells us, indeed, that he was *putting him to the test*.

Lord Jesus, deepen my understanding of the first and greatest commandment.

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The lawyer's query itself concerned the relative importance of the commandments: Which was the greatest commandment, that is, the one which, as it were, summed up all the others? This matter was a subject of endless debate in the rabbinical schools. Unlike the preceding discussion with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead, the one in which He was now asked to engage had a practical end: How, by what path, was heaven to be gained? The reply of Jesus was direct, clear, beautiful. He began, according to St. Mark's version of this incident, by quoting the text of the Law which the Jews wore inscribed on the fringe of their garments, and which proclaimed the unity of God and His sovereign dominion: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God*. Since God is one and His dominion absolute, Jesus concluded, the fundamental precept which implicitly contains all the rest is love of God above all things, a love which directs and submits to God the whole man, all the faculties of his body and soul; and which supposes in addition the love of neighbor for God's sake. Love of neighbor and love of God are child and parent. True love of neighbor is the overflow of true love of God.

The doctor of the Law, St. Mark tells us in his parallel version, cried out in admiration at the wisdom of our Savior's reply: *"Well answered, Master, thou hast said truly that he is one and that there is no other besides him; and that he should be loved with the whole heart, and with the whole understanding, and with the whole soul, and with*

*one's whole strength; and that to love one's neighbor as oneself is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices."* This reply showed that this man already had the spirit of Jesus and so he received the encouraging reply: "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*" We are not told what subsequently became of this doctor of the Law, but the impression left by St. Mark is very favorable. Thus we see what valuable recruits for the Gospel might have been found among the doctors of the Law, if they had possessed enough humility to accept the Master's teaching. But circumstances being as they were, how grave and ominous were the implications of our Savior's answer concerning the greatest of the commandments! At that very moment the Pharisees were actively plotting to put to death the Lord and God whom it was their whole work in life to love and serve with all the powers of their body and soul. Our Savior is the God whom the first and greatest commandment bids us love, and it is in Him also that the second great commandment has its true and full application. He is rightly the ultimate and highest, when He is not the immediate, object of every love that deserves the name here below. St. Augustine has said, "God loves men only in that they either are or may one day become members of His Son; it is His Son whom He loves in them." The supernatural charity that we possess is this same divine love communicated to us by the Holy Spirit; therefore, in exercising supernatural charity it is the Word of God whom we love, either as already present in ourselves and others or as prospectively present there.

*Happy the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen for his own inheritance. From heaven the Lord looks down; he sees all mankind. From his fixed throne he beholds*



*all who dwell on the earth, he who fashioned the heart of each, he who knows all their works* (Ps. 32:12-15).

NOVEMBER 26

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## *Lament Over Jerusalem*



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“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it”  
(Lk. 19:41).

Our Savior, about to enter Jerusalem in triumph, attended by His disciples and a large crowd, stopped to rest His gaze upon the city which was to be the scene of His death and to shed tears over its infidelity and imminent destruction.

Divine Master, let my tears mingle with Yours at the remembrance of my sins.

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From the Mount of Olives Jesus looked out over Jerusalem and the Temple, lying beautiful and resplendent before His eyes in the clear morning light. In spirit He saw the walls of the Holy City blackened by fire and totally demolished, and the children who now ran along at His side full of life and joy lying dead among the ruins. The magnificent Temple, one of the wonders of the world, He saw wrapped in flames and finally crumbling into a mass of rubble. Even from this same point of vantage on the western slope of Mount Olivet, Titus would direct his merciless siege of Jerusalem. And Jesus wept tears of mourning over the tragic fate awaiting this capital city of the Jews, which to Him represented the entire nation. He wept over Jerusalem's abuse of the grace and mercy God had heaped upon her

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from her origin to the present time. For three years He, the promised Messiah, had filled all Palestine with the fame of His miracles, and Jerusalem herself had witnessed numerous and brilliant prodigies of the divine Mercy; yet she had stubbornly resisted the light and peace which had repeatedly been offered her. So many graces and favors and yet the only return was greater hardness of heart and new evidences of ingratitude! But how many graces had been and are daily being lavished upon our souls, likewise, and what return are we making for them?

*"If thou hadst known, in this thy day, even thou, the things that are for thy peace!"* If all Jerusalem had accepted Christ, if the Jews had recognized their God-given opportunity, the Sacred Heart would have showered still greater blessings upon her. This city would have been forever the inheritance of the Lord and the glory of the nations. She would have rejoiced in solid happiness and enduring peace under the protection of her King and God. What profound peace we also should now be enjoying, if we had profited by all the opportunities offered us by our merciful Savior in the religious state, where it is so easy to work out our salvation and reach perfection! As long as life lasts, however, it is not too late to begin again, to embrace in earnest once and for all, a more fervent life and to find that peace which is inseparable from a singlehearted devotion to the service of God.

*"But now they are hidden from thy eyes."* Jerusalem no longer sees, she closes her eyes to her own best interests with growing callousness and obstinacy. She sees neither the good she is losing nor the evils she is calling down upon herself by the crimes which now defile her, and by that ultimate crime she is about to commit which will bring about her

total ruin. It may be that we, too, have fallen by degrees into a dangerous blindness of the spirit. Let us awaken ourselves to a realization of the preciousness of every passing moment that is given us for serving God. The saints were constantly aware of this and they turned every moment to supernatural account. Our days on earth are short; they quickly pass. An infinite reward is promised us if we learn to recognize and desire the things that are to our peace; but an irrevocable misfortune will follow upon the blindness which we ourselves will have allowed to darken the eyes of our souls.

O my Savior, let not the real state of my soul be hidden from me. Help me to see where my true happiness lies in every choice that is offered to me today. So many others have found peace and true joy in the practice of virtue, in fervor, in mortification. These means are at my disposal too. With Your grace, good Jesus, I shall seek for my happiness where the saints have ever sought and found theirs.

NOVEMBER 27

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### *The Widow's Mite*



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“And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and observed how the crowd were putting money into the treasury . . . And there came one poor widow, and she put in two mites, which make a quadrans” (Mk. 12:41, 42).

After a fatiguing day of conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus, wishing to rest a little, ascended the steps leading from the Court of the Gentiles to the Women’s Court and sat

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down opposite the thirteen contribution boxes, which were intended to receive the offering of the people for the expense of public worship and the maintenance of the Temple edifice. Divine Master, help me to give all to You with love and without counting the cost.

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As Jesus sat quietly at a short distance from the disciples who had accompanied Him and were now probably talking together, He carefully observed what was happening around Him. Great throngs of pilgrims who had come to take part in the Paschal festival were dropping their offerings into the boxes placed for this purpose at the entrance to the Hall of the Treasury. Many rich persons were throwing in their liberal contributions, perhaps with pharisaical ostentation. Now there came a woman of humble station, poor, and a widow, as her garb indicated. Into one of the trumpet-shaped openings she timidly dropped two small coins, worth less than half a cent. It was all she had to live on, as Jesus knew. Her contribution was as nothing compared with the offerings of the rich, and yet, in proportion, she gave infinitely more than the others. Moved by deep love and serious piety, she was performing her religious duty at the cost of great personal sacrifice, without thought of return and in a spirit of resolute confidence in God.

Perhaps the act itself of depositing her modest contribution caused this poor woman painful embarrassment, since it had to be performed under the contemptuous glances of those who stood about. But Jesus also was there; and He judged her action truly, because He knew all the circumstances. Then He took this occasion of teaching His Apostles yet again, and for the last time, that the only gift that matters to God is the gift of the heart. He called the disciples

together—and one wonders with what sentiments Judas, if he was present, listened to this instruction. Pointing toward the poor widow, our Savior praised the good work she had just performed, saying, *“Amen I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who have been putting money into the treasury. For all they have put in out of their abundance; but she out of her want has put in all that she had—all that she had to live on.”*

In this poor widow Jesus found the true ideal of piety and trust in God. Everywhere God has His elect, who belong to Him, and here and there throughout the Gospel we see them revealed, darting rays of brightness through the somber gloom of error and malice. This incident must have been as a sweet and consoling refreshment to our Savior at the close of His day of conflict with the Pharisees. For us also it is as a beautiful ray of light shining through the clouds of unbelief, blasphemy, and hatred which were gathering ever more thickly about our divine Master, like the shadows of hell. What a touching contrast there is between the action of this poor woman and the intolerable egoism, the bitter, hardened incredulity of those who held honor and authority among their people!

Lord, grant me the spirit of generosity that never stops to consider what is of strict obligation, but only what it is possible to do. And enable me to perform this utmost that I can do with a magnanimous heart, with a great love, without ever thinking that I do much. Never let me count the cost, where Your will is concerned, to convenience, preference, time, or health.

*Parable of the Ten Virgins*



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“Then will the kingdom of heaven be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom and the bride. Five of them were foolish and five wise” (Mt. 25:1, 2).

The uncertainty of the time of the general judgment is asserted with particular force in the parable of the ten virgins. The purpose of this parable is to encourage us to continued vigilance and zeal, even though the Son of Man is long in coming. Divine Savior, keep ever before my mind the reality of Your coming and the daily necessity of preparing for it.

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An important feature of the marriage ceremony among the Jews was the procession escorting the bride to her husband's house in the evening by lamp and torchlight, with singing and instrumental music. The first section of the parable of the ten young maidens who have been invited to the wedding of one of their friends depicts the preparation for such a procession following the arrival of the bridegroom. This preparation is not the same for all. Five of the maidens not only stock their lamps, but providently take with them in addition small flasks of oil, so as to be ready for any eventuality. The other five, who are foolish and unreflecting, do not foresee that the bridegroom may be late in coming, and so they merely fill their lamps. All, then, wearied by the prolonged wait, fall asleep. The lesson to be learned so far is that the Christian soul must be ready to meet the divine Bridegroom at whatever hour He presents Himself.

This moment deciding our eternal fate is different for each one of us and uncertain for all. We must not become so accustomed to living in the world, however, that we stop our eager preparations for our inevitable appearance before God. We must never cease looking for Him nor allow our store of fervor to become exhausted.

The second portion of the parable concerns the arrival of the bridegroom. Three features are especially to be noted: his coming is delayed, it occurs suddenly, and it is unexpected. The sleep of the maidens, which is not presented as in any way blameworthy, serves to emphasize these three points. When the cry rings out at midnight: "*Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go forth to meet him,*" the foolish virgins, being suddenly awakened, find that their lamps have gone out for want of oil. They ask their provident companions in vain for assistance and must go out at this unseasonable hour to try to persuade someone to open his shop and supply their needs. While they are away the bridegroom arrives, the procession is formed in haste, and all is over by the time they return.

The third part of the parable shows us the consequences of their folly. The doors are closed; grief and supplication alike are now useless. The foolish virgins are and will remain excluded from the wedding feast, the bridegroom's answer to their entreaties being only the stern words: "*Amen I say to you, I do not know you.*" Only watchful souls with lamps of faith and perseverance in good works constantly alight will be admitted to the eternal and mystical wedding feast of heaven. Nothing will be of any avail if we are unready at the crucial moment when the Son of Man appears to lead the guests to His banquet. There is only one time, one hour, for admission to the feast; once that hour has passed the

door is closed; it is too late. Moreover, Jesus reminds us by this parable that we cannot borrow virtue; if we have not spent our lives amassing this personal, inalienable treasure, which, even so, may barely suffice for our own needs, we shall be rejected. *"Watch, therefore,"* warns our Savior, *"for you know neither the day nor the hour."*

O Jesus, I thank You for continuing to prolong my life. As long as life lasts there is time for Your mercies. As long as I live on this earth I can love and serve You meritoriously. Let not sin ever efface in me Your image and likeness, so that at the moment when I stand at the gate of eternity I may not justly hear those dread words: *"I know you not."* Deign Yourself, O merciful Jesus, to keep the lamp of my fervor alight with the oil of supernatural charity, and let me not for a moment lose my eager anticipation of Your coming.

NOVEMBER 29

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### *Parable of the Talents*



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"For it is like a man going abroad, who called his servants and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his particular ability, and then he went on his journey" (Mt. 25:14-16).

This parable reflects a practice which was not rare among the ancients, whereby a rich man starting on a long journey entrusted to his reliable servants the administration of his property.

O Jesus, make my conscience more sensitive to sins of omission.

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The master in this parable clearly represents God. The varying amounts of the deposits left with the servants may be taken as symbols of the goods, natural and supernatural, that God has entrusted to us, and of which we must render an account before His judgment seat. We are inclined to think more of the evil that we do during our lives than of the good we leave undone. As born servants of a sovereign Master we are bound to make the goods we receive from Him fruitful; and to forget or neglect this is to fail in our duty. Even if at the end of a day, at the end of a life, we could not recall any positive sin, we may not, therefore, believe ourselves guiltless. Hands that are clean but empty are guilty hands. The master in the parable commands the indolent servant who hid his lord's money, and who was insolent as well as slothful to be cast *into the darkness outside*. The two good servants, on the other hand, who had doubled the money confided to them, received the same reward, even though a larger sum had been entrusted to one than to the other.

Our individual abilities and resources differ. But, as we learn from this parable, the reward is measured not according to the results we can show, but by our zeal and diligence in making use of the talents that have been given us. We are obliged to turn all to profit—health, intelligence, time, the circumstances in which we find ourselves. St. Francis of Assisi, after his conversion, had a dream in which he saw two pictures, one representing the life he should have led, the other, the life he actually had led in the past. The first vision presented a splendid scene, the second, a deplorable one. We also shall one day view two scenes such as these and perhaps the contrast between them will overwhelm us with shame.

Let us, then, take care now, while time is still given us, not to be wholly taken up with avoiding evil, but frequently examine whether we are doing all the good that is in our power; that is, whether we are sincerely and fully using the gifts we have received, as the will of God, expressed by the obligations of our religious life, dictates. *"Take away therefore the talent from him"* (i.e., the wicked and slothful servant), said the Master in the parable, *"and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him who does not have, even that which he seems to have shall be taken away."* The eternal reward is to be given to those who work for it. They who do not increase their treasure of supernatural grace will be deprived of it, and the glory which should have been theirs will pass to another. *Therefore, St. Paul wisely admonishes us, while we have time let us do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Deign to make known to me, O Jesus, whether I am serving You well. Am I using the precious moments of my short life to sanctify my soul and contribute to the salvation of others? I sincerely desire to make good use of all the gifts You have bestowed upon me and daily continue to bestow. Help me, good Jesus, to apply all the energy of my will to seeking Your good pleasure in everything and never my own.

## *The Last Judgment*



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“And he will send forth his angels with a trumpet and a great sound, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from end to end of the heavens” (Mt. 24:31).

Our Savior predicted the Last Judgment in the same discourse in which He foretold the chastisement of Jerusalem. The latter event was to be the first act of His power as Judge; the universal judgment will be the last, and it will also mark the consummation of His glorious kingdom on earth.

“Think, kind Jesus! my salvation caused Thy wondrous incarnation; leave me not to reprobation.”

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The liturgical cycle closes with the last week of the ecclesiastical year, and the Church now places before us the sobering thought of the final moment of human history. The Last Judgment, which will then take place will be a universal judgment. All the peoples of the earth will see the sign of the Son of Man coming with His angels and all men will be gathered before Him. Every individual undergoes a particular judgment at the moment when his soul leaves this world, but all men will be judged once more as members of society: the family, the community, the nation, humanity. The very theme of the sentence that will then be pronounced has to do with man's duties as a member of society. Nothing is more certain than that this general judgment will take place. Apart from the predictions of the prophets, Jesus Himself foretold it in the most explicit and formal manner; yet nothing is more uncertain

than the day and the hour when it will occur. This hour is known only to the Father, for to Him as Creator of the world such knowledge belongs. The knowledge of the Son is equal to or, rather, is the same as that of the Father, but in His character as Son of Man and Messiah, He regulated His knowledge by what His role required.

Again, the coming of the Son of Man at the Last Judgment will be sudden and unexpected. There will be no warning signs of His second coming, our Savior tells us: *As the lightning . . . suddenly as a snare it will come upon all who dwell on the face of all the earth.* So sudden will the judgment be, that of two persons working together in the same field or at the same mill, one will be saved and the other lost, according to the dispositions in which they are found; for they will not have time to prepare themselves. The imagination and mind of man dares not attempt to forecast how the return of Christ will be visibly accomplished; how He who bears the winnowing fan in His hand will make the great separation; in what new forms our new life will be clothed, that life transfigured by the very life of Jesus, which will pervade all His elect. Man's boldest powers are incapable of fathoming the secrets of infinite love. All our wisdom is but folly before the eternal designs.

On that day the oppression of the good and the triumph of the wicked will end; virtue and vice will be given the recompense they respectively merit. What will be our lot then? Let us ever bear in mind that we must give an account of our whole conduct sooner or later: *It is appointed unto men to die once but after this comes the judgment.* Whatever may be the divine decree regarding the last moment of the world, the end of our lives will be the end of the world for us. But just as the thought of his personal

death cannot terrify the disciple of Jesus, since he sees in it only the supreme transformation of his being, his summons to the final life with God, so the anticipation of universal death does not disturb him. For him the end of the world is the condition of universal renewal, the preparation for the everlasting kingdom of Christ in heaven.

O God, You fill heaven and earth with Your immensity. Your throne and royal power are in our hearts. We are now and always in Your presence. O divine Majesty, I lift my soul to You, nothingness as I am. *Sustain me as you have promised, that I may live. . . . Deal with your servant according to your kindness and teach me your statutes.*



# FESTIVALS AND SAINTS





*The Conversion of St. Paul*



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“Thou art a vessel of election, O holy Apostle, Paul, a preacher of truth to the whole world; through whom all nations have known the grace of God” (response from the second Nocturn for the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul).

Our Savior, although He was already seated at the right hand of the Father, bestowed upon St. Paul the unique privilege of being called and instructed by Him personally in his great role as Apostle of the Gentiles.

O great St. Paul, teach me that confidence in Jesus which will cause me to experience as you did His power in my weakness.

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A Jew and a Roman citizen, a Pharisee and probably the son of Pharisees, Saul left his native Tarsus at the age of thirteen years to finish his education as a Scribe at Jerusalem. Here he became a zealous persecutor of the Church. *I persecuted the church of God and ravaged it*, he later wrote. And his own confession is confirmed in the Acts: *But Saul was harassing the Church; entering house after house, and dragging out men and women, he committed them to prison.* His zeal extended even beyond Jerusalem to Damascus. Rarely has there been a persecutor of the Church more relentless, more cruel, or more ingenious than Saul.

Meanwhile, the Apostles and the whole Church were begging God to protect them from Saul. Their prayers were answered by the greatest miracle of conversion that has ever gladdened the Church. The Church will never be able to praise God sufficiently for the conversion of Saul. Yet, before

Saul could enter upon his apostolate, he had to be formed by a long and hidden preparation, a prolonged retreat. For three years he remained secluded in "Arabia" (probably the desert region south of Damascus). Here the teachings of the Gospel penetrated his whole being little by little, and here he accumulated the spiritual energy with which he would later *announce among the Gentiles the good tidings of the unfathomable riches of Christ and . . . enlighten all men as to what is the dispensation of the mystery which has been hidden from eternity in God.* Upon Paul's return to Damascus his preaching aroused such great fury among the Jews that he had to make his escape by being let down over the city wall in a basket. Resentment against him was strong in Jerusalem also, whither he now journeyed to see Peter; and so, warned in a vision which came to him in the Temple, he went back to Tarsus and again spent the next five or six years in retirement.

Powerful as the grace was which converted Paul, God did not exempt him from the human necessity of a gradual preparation for his future career. He did not become the Apostle of the Gentiles on the day or on the morrow of the apparition which caused his conversion, but after a period of years spent in retirement, after leading, like his Master, a "hidden life." And do we think that we can make apostolic workers of ourselves or of others in a day, or that any activity of ours can be supernaturally fruitful which intimate union with God through prayer and detachment has not sanctified?

"Almighty and everlasting God, who, of Your divine mercy, instructed Your blessed Apostle Paul in what he should do that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost; by his admonitions directing us and his merits interceding for us, grant that we

may serve You in fear and trembling and so be filled with the comfort of Your heavenly gifts" (*Raccolta*).

JANUARY 29

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*St. Francis de Sales*

A.D. 1567-1622



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"My dear children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:18).

St. Francis de Sales is our great model of the practical love of neighbor as shown in gentleness and affability.

O gentle St. Francis, help me to learn meekness as you did in the school of Jesus Christ.

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The virtue of Christian meekness comes to mind at the very mention of the name of St. Francis de Sales; yet meekness was not a natural trait of his character. He tells us himself that he had by nature a hasty and violent temper and that he acquired meekness only after a struggle lasting for twenty years. But so well did he succeed in disciplining his temperament that amiability became, as it were, natural to him. This virtue was an important source of the remarkable success of St. Francis' apostolate among heretics, especially the followers of Calvin, whose stronghold was located in the very district of St. Francis' apostolic ministry. We are told that he brought back to the faith nearly seventy thousand heretics. He might have suppressed the Calvinist heresy without the practice of his characteristic virtue, but

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he would not have won the hearts of the heretics to Christ. "If you wish the heretics to be convinced of their error," said Cardinal du Perron, "you may send them to me; but if you want them to be converted, send them to the Bishop of Geneva."

We who are given to bursts of impatience upon every trifling occasion would do well to reflect upon and put into practice the following advice of this lovable saint: "The most powerful remedy against the attacks of impatience is a sweet and amiable silence. If one speaks at all, however little, self-love will have a share in it, and some word will escape that may sour the heart and disturb its peace for a long time. When nothing is said and cheerfulness is preserved, the storm subsides, anger and indiscretion are put to flight, and only joy, pure and lasting, remains." St. Francis knew also how to combine with the gentleness of a father the energetic zeal of an apostle. Strong first against himself, he made, at the age of eighteen, a vow of chastity, placing himself under the protection of the Blessed Virgin. Subsequently, he was attacked by an agonizing temptation to despair of his salvation. The trial was severe and prolonged, but deliverance came after an heroic act of pure love made as he was kneeling before a miraculous image of our Lady. "O Lord," he prayed, "if I am never to see Thee in heaven, grant me this favor at least—that I may never curse or blaspheme Thy holy Name. If I am not to love Thee in the other world, for in hell none praise Thee, let me at least love Thee as much as I can at every instant of my brief existence here."

Sent by his bishop after ordination to Le Chablais on the south shore of Lake Geneva to bring back to the faith those led astray by Calvinism, he labored against the most formid-

able odds and at the repeated risk of his life until the lost sheep were again in the fold. His priestly ministry, especially in the confessional, he directed by preference to the poor; and extremely learned though he was, having earned the degree of Doctor of Law at the age of twenty-four, he preached with such simplicity and directness as to captivate his unlearned hearers. After being elevated to the episcopal dignity, St. Francis remained until death the faithful shepherd of the Church of Geneva. We should do well to study the union of true amiability with zeal in this model of Catholic bishops. Like all the virtues, amiability has its counterfeit in the world, a counterfeit that is cheaply acquired; but amiability like that of St. Francis is true and active charity, constant, and entirely devoid of self-seeking.

“O God, by whose gracious will blessed Francis, Thy confessor and bishop, became all things to all men for the salvation of their souls, grant, we beseech Thee, that being filled with the sweetness of Thy love, we may, by the guidance of his counsels and by the aid of his merits, attain unto the joys of everlasting life” (Collect).

## FEBRUARY 2

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### *The Purification of Our Lady*



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“And when the days of her purification were fulfilled according to the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Lk. 2:22).

In spirit let us enter the Temple of Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph and the Infant Jesus on the day of our Lady's purification.

O Virgin Mary, obtain for me the grace to imitate your obedience, humility, and purity.

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The law of purification required that women who had become mothers should present themselves in the Temple forty days after the birth of their child. They were to bring as a sacrificial offering a lamb or, in the case of the poor, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons; one for holocaust, that is, a thanksgiving offering for the birth of the child, and another for sin, that is, ritual uncleanness resulting from childbirth. This prescription was meant as a reminder to the mothers that they had brought into the world a child stained with original sin. Obviously, the law did not apply to Mary, since her divine Child was the fruit of her virginity and not of ordinary generation. Yet, so great was Mary's love for obedience that she complied with the law fully and in every detail. What pleasure Jesus would take in us and how Mary would love us if we obeyed like this!

No less striking is our Lady's humility. She consented to forfeit in public opinion the glory of her virginity, by allowing herself to be looked upon as no different from other mothers. Furthermore, descendant though she was of the royal line of David, she veiled the nobility of her lineage by external poverty. It was the offering of the poor that she brought to the altar. Everything about her is hidden, obscure; her beauty is all within. O Heart of Mary, heaven of humility, make my heart like yours!

But whereas our Lady submitted to the law of purification with joy, because she loved obedience and humility, at what cost to herself did she make the sacrifice of her divine Son! She knew the prophecies referring to the Messiah and, as if

all she had read in Isaias and David had not sufficiently enlightened her concerning her future sorrows, Simeon now added a new prediction, saying, "*And thine own soul a sword shall pierce.*" She had ransomed her Child according to the Law, and had received Him into her arms again, but the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross was on this day newly foreseen and accepted by her. One day it would come to pass. Until then its horrors would be enacted at every instant within her maternal heart; but Mary did not draw back. A spark of the divine charity which burned in the heart of Jesus had penetrated Mary's immaculate heart. And while the priest lifted Him in his arms toward God, Mary associated herself fully with His act of immolation.

"We beseech Thee, O Lord, that by the intercession of blessed Mary ever Virgin Thou would make the most holy mysteries which Thou hast conferred upon us for the preservation of our spiritual life both a present and future remedy" (Post-communion of the Mass for the feast of the Purification of our Lady).

FEBRUARY 11

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### *Our Lady of Lourdes*



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"God who is omnipotent hath girt me with strength; and made my way to be without spot" (versicle and response of the first Nocturn for the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes).

On February 11, 1858, four years after the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Immaculate Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in a series of eighteen apparitions at

the grotto of Massabielle in southern France. The spring which began to flow from the rock during the course of the apparitions has become a channel of countless miracles that have made the name of Our Lady of Lourdes famous all over the world.

Our Lady of Lourdes, by your powerful intercession, obtain for my soul the miracle of sanctity.

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St. Bernadette described the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin as follows: "She had the look of a girl of sixteen or seventeen. She was dressed in a white robe, fastened at the waist with a blue sash. On her head she wore a white veil, falling behind almost to her feet, which were covered, partly by her dress, partly by yellow roses. On her right arm there hung a rosary with white beads on a golden chain that shone like the two roses on her feet. She was alert, young, and surrounded with light." At Lourdes Mary was, above all, our Holy Queen. Her hands were folded in the attitude of prayer, and she seemed to Bernadette to be inviting her to pray. When Bernadette knelt down to say the rosary, our Lady also passed her own beads through her fingers, but her lips did not move. Mary could not appropriately have said any of the prayers of our rosary except the "Glory be to the Father"; but in her heart she was listening to the eternal echo of Gabriel's greeting and to the murmur of the angelical salutation rising to her from the whole earth. Through Mary's fingers, however, pass all the rosaries said by all the souls on earth; they pass through her most pure hands to her Son.

Nowhere in her conversations with St. Bernadette does it seem that our Lady promised miracles or cures, but the spring which she caused to gush forth from the grotto floor



very soon began to reveal its marvelous efficacy. But the greatest miracles worked at Lourdes are those by which the sick are sent away unimproved in bodily health, but transformed in soul. Mary does not always wipe away our tears, but she shows us how to unite them with her own and those of Jesus. Thus she obtains for us the greatest favor of all—a share in the joy and peace which were hers in the midst of her grief and anguish. This is her special gift. She said to Bernadette, “I do not promise to make you happy in this life, but in the next,” and when Bernadette came to die, almost her last words were, “I desire Thy Cross, O God.”

When our Lady does cure the infirmities of the body, it is to help the infirmity of the soul. Her most important cures are those she works under the title “Hospital of Sinners” by which she was invoked in an ancient litany. Mary is particularly attentive to our interior poverty, for she knows how limited our inner resources are. There is no spiritual need which Mary does not understand, none for which she does not have the appropriate remedy. The Curé of Ars says, “I think the Blessed Virgin will rest at the end of the world, but as long as there is an earth, she is being pulled at from all sides. The Blessed Virgin is like a mother with many children; she is continually going from one to another.”

O ever immaculate Virgin, Mother of mercy, you know all my anxieties and the secret needs of my soul; deign to cast upon me your glance of mercy. You were pleased to make the Grotto of Lourdes a privileged sanctuary for the dispensing of your favors, and unnumbered thousands have received there the cure of their infirmities of body and soul, until Lourdes has become as a fathomless ocean of healing. With boundless confidence, therefore, O merciful Lady of Lourdes, I come

to implore health of soul and body; most of all, I beg the grace to imitate your virtues, especially your purity and virginal modesty, so that one day I may share your glory and bless you for all eternity.

## MARCH 17

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### *St. Patrick*

ca. A.D. 461



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“The eyes of the Lord look favorably upon him; he raises him free of the vile dust, lifts up his head and exalts him to the amazement of the many” (Ecclus. 11:12, 13).

St. Patrick, “a husbandman, an exile, and unlearned,” as he humbly describes himself, was chosen by God to convert all Ireland to the true faith. The ardent devotion to their father in Christ which the Irish people have preserved for fifteen centuries is expressed in the affectionate praise of an ancient Irish chronicle wherein St. Patrick is addressed as “a lion in strength and power, a dove in gentleness and humility, a fair flower garden to the children of grace.”

Pray for us, O glorious St. Patrick, that your spirit of faith may take possession of our minds and wills.

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At the age of sixteen years Patrick was brought as a captive to Ireland by marauders of his native land, whether Wales, Caledonia, Gaul, or Roman Britain. For six years he lived as a slave among the still pagan inhabitants of Ireland, but the hardships of bondage only hastened his marvelous growth

in holiness. As, alone with God, he tended his master's flocks, he seems to have been initiated, even so young, into the way of divine union. "Now, after I came to Ireland," he tells us, "tending flocks was my daily occupation and constantly I used to pray in the daytime. Love of God and the fear of Him increased more and more; and faith grew, and the spirit was moved. . . . Before daybreak I used to be roused to prayer in snow, in frost, in rain; and I felt no hurt, nor was there any sluggishness in me, because, as I now see, the Spirit was burning within me."

At length Patrick succeeded in making his escape from slavery, traveling some two hundred miles to a port, where he found a ship ready to sail. After a long and hazardous voyage he was finally reunited with his mother's relatives in Brittany. They welcomed him warmly, "as a son," he tells us, but interior promptings and visions soon urged Patrick back again to Ireland. He himself describes for us the "visions in the night" in which he was given a letter. "I read," he says, "the beginning of the letter, which was entitled, 'The Voice of the Irish'; and while I was reading aloud the beginning of the letter I thought that at that very moment I heard the voice of them who lived beside the wood of Focluth, which is nigh unto the Western sea. And thus they cried as with one mouth: 'We beseech thee, holy youth, to come and walk among us once more.' And I was exceedingly broken in heart and could read no more. And so I awoke."

The order of immediately subsequent events is uncertain, but it appears that Patrick spent several years in France preparing for his great work in Ireland. St. Germanus of Auxerre seems to have acted as his spiritual guide, and it was by that great bishop that the future Apostle of Ireland

was ordained to the priesthood. In 432, just before he entered upon his glorious mission he was consecrated bishop either by St. Germanus or St. Maximus of Turin. During the next thirty years Patrick's labors and sufferings merited the conversion of all Ireland to Christianity. The land became, as it were, another Bethlehem. The shepherds came from the hillsides to adore the Christ whom St. Patrick brought to Ireland. Kings laid their crowns at His feet, and the fire on the Hill of Tara was the star that guided them. Shortly before his death, St. Patrick, like Moses on Mount Sinai, fasted, prayed, and did penance for forty days on Croagh-Patrick, Ireland's holy hill, in order to win blessings for his cherished children. "From this hill," says an early chronicle, "Patrick blessed the people of Ireland, and his object in climbing to its summit was that he might pray for them and see the fruit of all his labors." Borrowing from the prayer composed by St. Patrick in preparation for his victory over paganism, let us implore our merciful God for the spirit of faith, the attachment to the divine will, the absolute abandonment to divine providence which imparted such marvelous fruitfulness to St. Patrick's words and works.

"I bind to myself today: the Might of God for my piloting; the Power of God for my upholding; the Wisdom of God for my guidance; Eyes of God for my foresight; Ear of God for my hearing; Word of God for my utterance; Hand of God for my guardianship; Path of God to lie before me; Shield of God for my protection; Host of God for my salvation" (from the *Lorica* [i.e., breastplate] of St. Patrick).

*St. Joseph, Spouse of Our Lady,  
Patron of the Universal Church*



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“A faithful man shall be much praised; and he that is the keeper of his Lord shall be glorified” (Little Chapter of the Office for the feast of St. Joseph).

The Church applies these words from the Book of Proverbs to St. Joseph, spouse of Mary, foster father of Jesus, and patron of the Universal Church.

Glorious St. Joseph, increase my confidence in your intercession.

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What must have been the splendors of the soul of Joseph, spouse of Mary, foster father of Jesus, and the earthly representative of the Eternal Father! The adorable Trinity had resolved to elevate the Virgin of Nazareth to the highest imaginable dignity by accomplishing in her the mystery of the Incarnation and making her for this purpose the masterpiece of grace after Christ's own humanity. God could honor her further only by making the man destined to share her supreme destiny the most worthy of all men in incomparable holiness. There was no sentiment, however noble, no affection, however pure, no faith, however living, no charity, however ardent, in the heart of the Virgin Mother which was not also in the heart of her virgin spouse. So perfect was he in the practice of virtue, especially of purity, obedience, and poverty, that if Mary is the Queen of all the blessed, St. Joseph is undoubtedly first among the saints.

There is, above all, the stupendous truth that St. Joseph

represented the First Person of the Blessed Trinity on earth. The Son and the Holy Spirit came in their own Persons to minister to mankind, but the earthly mission of the Father was entrusted to St. Joseph. "All the angels and the highest seraphim in heaven bear the name only of servants of God," says St. Basil; "Joseph alone of the whole Church militant and triumphant has the honor of bearing the name of father of the Savior of mankind." But, since the human nature of Jesus remains forever linked with His divine Person, the love of His heart for His mother and foster father is greater than ever, now that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. What special honor and power, then, must St. Joseph enjoy in heaven, since on earth he was on closer terms of intimacy with Jesus than any mortal creature except Mary!

The Church invites us, therefore, to have recourse with full confidence to this all-powerful Protector. The world we live in is filled with miseries which would make stouter hearts than ours quake with fear; but let us invoke St. Joseph with faith and we shall be protected. In all our trials and anxieties let us *go to Joseph*. The pharaoh of Egypt so advised his people when they were suffering from famine. The King of heaven says the same to us, but with stronger reason; for the faithful Guardian of Mary has greater influence than Jacob's son with a far more powerful monarch than Egypt's pharaoh. How could we refuse St. Joseph the homage of our sincere devotion when we see him honored by the angels, by the Queen of virgins, by Jesus Christ Himself; and by the whole Church, which proclaims him the protector of Christians in general and in particular of religious orders?

O great St. Joseph, I am unable to offer you worthy praise, but

I ask you to accept at least the homage of my deep veneration and my filial confidence and love. Take me under your protection in a special way and teach me to love and serve Jesus and Mary as you did. Heart of Joseph, most pure and most faithful, pray for us.

MARCH 21

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*St. Benedict*

ca. A.D. 480-543



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“Now will I praise those godly men, our ancestors, each in his own time” (Ecclus. 44:1).

This text in eulogy of the saints the Church applies today to the great St. Benedict, founder of Western monasticism.

O glorious patriarch, St. Benedict, help me to make my prayer and labor efficacious for the spiritual good of others.

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St. Benedict was the son of a Roman noble of Nursia, a small town near Spoleto. His boyhood, however, was spent in Rome. The civilized world of his day, overrun by pagans and Arians, seemed to be lapsing rapidly into barbarism. The Church was rent by schism. Town and countryside were being devastated by war and pillage. Shameful sins were rampant among Christians as well as among the heathen. Benedict, revolted by the licentiousness of his companions and fearing for his own virtue, left Rome in his young manhood and retired to a solitude in Subiaco some miles distant from the city. Here he was directed and cared for by a holy monk named Romanus. Soon, despite his retired

life and rare contacts with the world, Benedict became known and respected. In the neighborhood of Subiaco there resided at the time a community of monks who had lost their abbot by death. They asked St. Benedict to take his place. Benedict consented with reluctance, for he knew of the relaxed life that was led in this monastery. And in due time, as St. Benedict had foreseen, the monks became resentful of his insistence upon strict discipline. They mixed poison with his wine to order to get rid of him; but when, according to his custom, he made the sign of the cross over the cup before drinking, it broke into pieces.

St. Benedict returned to his cave in Subiaco where other disciples gathered about him, attracted by his growing reputation for miracles and sanctity. His first monasteries, twelve in number and inhabited by a superior and twelve monks, were now established. Then, about 529, St. Benedict founded the monastery of Monte Cassino, the most famous abbey in the world. There he wrote his great Rule, which was to nourish the religious life of the West for centuries. Of his monks St. Benedict demanded a life of prayer, study, and manual labor. His monasteries, it may be said, civilized and molded Christian Europe by bringing it the blessings of faith, learning, and art. To the Church, moreover, they have given forty popes and more than three thousand saints.

These mighty achievements were initiated by a man who spent most of his life in seclusion — three years in the solitude of Subiaco and then a further period of retirement on Monte Cassino. Those years spent in seclusion were the starting point of the most fruitful work ever achieved by man: the establishment of Western monasticism. Again we see illustrated the truth of the words of St. Francis de Sales, "What is good makes no noise; noise does no good." The



more the initiator of a good work remains hidden, the more efficacious will be his action, provided he is hidden in God. The more St. Benedict fled from the world and material things, the more God poured graces into his soul and surrounded him with spiritual and heavenly-minded men, who joined him in the service and praise of the Most High. Let us perpetuate in our lives the method of St. Benedict, that our souls, too, by the practice of recollection and the interior life, may become, as it were, radiant centers of holiness and spiritual power, which will overflow into our external works of zeal and so impart to them an irresistible force.

O great patriarch, St. Benedict, obtain for me the grace to be like you, humble, mortified, and fervent, that I may receive from God the lights needful to guide me in the way of sanctity, and that I may continually and diligently seek out my eternal salvation.

MARCH 25

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### *The Annunciation to Our Lady*



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“And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son” (Lk. 1:31).

All the faith and hope of past ages, all the riches of grace bestowed upon Mary since her Immaculate Conception, found in this moment their fulfillment and perfection; and as the waves of the sea, the waters of salvation now began to gush out upon the whole world.

O ever blessed Virgin Mary, help me to observe in spirit and in truth the vows I made under your protection.

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God created the universe by an act of His omnipotence; but in the mystery of the Annunciation He willed to act only with the consent of His creature. Since the Incarnation was to be an alliance made between the Word of God and human nature, it was fitting that Mary give her consent in the name of humanity. God need not have made her willingness the necessary condition for our Redemption, but such was His decree and, therefore, so it was. He decreed likewise to move Mary's heart, so that freely and yet most certainly she would co-operate in His eternal designs.

The greeting of the archangel Gabriel, his message, the freedom permitted Mary to give or withhold her consent—all the circumstances of the Annunciation did stupendous honor to Mary. She showed herself worthy of it by the excellent virtues she practiced on this occasion. There is, first of all, the deep humility with which she received Gabriel's high praise. The words, "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,*" came from the lips of an archangel fresh from the splendors of heaven, and they were uttered in the name of the Most High, who is infinite Holiness. What was Mary's response? She said nothing; she experienced no least movement of self-complacency. Her first reaction was one of uneasiness: *She was troubled at his word*, says St. Luke, that is, at this first glimpse of her own beauty and grandeur. It had not been so with Lucifer nor with Eve; their beauty and excellence had been for them a snare by which they were entrapped. But in Mary's case, the more sublime the praise, the more she retires into the consciousness of her own nothingness. What supernatural wisdom and humility of heart in this young maiden!

No less admirable is the prudence revealed in the few words then spoken by Mary. The angel had announced that she was

to become a mother. Mary asked, "*How shall this happen, since I do not know man?*" The question was not prompted by incredulity or doubt as Zachary's had been. Mary believed firmly, but she wished to know how God's guidance in the past and His present will were to be reconciled. Then, when she was told of the mystery of virginal maternity that would be accomplished in her, Mary crowned all her virtues by her complete and instant abandonment to the will of God: "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.*" Never yet had God been honored by an act which comprised so much beauty, profundity, and power as this consent of Mary's which gave life to the Incarnate Word and made Mary in that instant the Mother of God and us His children. We are all asked to echo in our own way the *Fiat* of Mary. God does not force us; we are *asked* to surrender all that we are to the Holy Spirit and to *allow* Christ to fill our emptiness. To be efficacious, however, our surrender must be like Mary's, that is, without reserve or condition; and it must embrace everything as hers did: the thoughts, affections, joys, and sorrows of our daily lives, our work and prayer.

"O most happy Mary, who can render thee adequate thanks for the help thou hast given a lost world by thy consent to Gabriel's demand? What praise can be presented by our fallen nature which found the beginning of all deliverance through thee? Accept, we beseech thee, our thanks, lowly and weak though we be; accept our resolutions and excuse our sins by thy prayers. Receive what we offer thee, give what we ask of thee, pardon what we fear, thou who art the sole hope of our happiness" (St. Augustine).

*Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel*



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“Mother of Good Counsel, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

This glorious title of our Lady presents her to us as the teacher of the great truths which were divinely communicated to her. O Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, obtain for me the grace of remembering to invoke you in all anxieties and doubts.

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Records dating from the fifteenth century relate the miraculous appearance of a picture of our Lady, called at first “The Madonna of Paradise” but now better known as “The Mother of Good Counsel,” at Genazzano, a small Italian town about thirty miles southeast of Rome. Toward evening on St. Mark’s day in 1467, during the annual public fiesta, when the streets of Genazzano were crowded with merrymakers, a number of people standing in the main square saw a cloud float across the clear sky and attach itself to a wall of the chapel of St. Blaise in the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel. This fifth-century church, having fallen into serious disrepair, was then in the process of being rebuilt. The observers saw the cloud part and reveal in its center a small portrait of the Virgin and Child. This picture had come to rest against the face of the wall on a narrow ledge several feet from the ground, and, the records state further, all the church bells of the town began to ring at that moment. Later investigation by a papal commission showed that this picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel was none other

than the one venerated for centuries at Scutari in Albania, which city was being ravaged by the Turks at the time of the picture's disappearance. Moreover, the eggshell-thin sheet of plaster stood in its new location with no visible support except the narrow ledge upon which it rested. For five hundred years this extraordinary phenomenon has remained unchanged. Although surrounded by rich golden framework and adorned with precious jewels, at no point is this fragile painting supported except at the base, and none of the ornaments is permitted to touch it in any part.

It would seem that the title of "Mother of Good Counsel" is especially dear to our Lady. Which of her titles honors her more? For when she is invoked as the Lady of Good Counsel, she is acclaimed as the Mother of Him whom Isaias foretold as *Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty*, and she is honored also as the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Advocate. Not to speak of the Apostles and the earliest Christians, many later saints who have done great work for the Church relied on the guidance and efficacious intercession of the Mother of Good Counsel. St. Dominic, for example, had recourse to Mary to discover what means he should use to convert the Albigenses and her answer was the rosary. Also, it was before our Lady's image in the grotto of Manresa that St. Ignatius Loyola received his marvelous enlightenment on the Gospel. We too have great need of our Lady's counsel for our spiritual advancement, our work, the advice we must give to others. She is an infallible Guide, a Tower of strength against the enemy. She can and will direct all our affairs, small and great. She can give us that wisdom, strength, and light, that spirit of good counsel which guides the soul through the ways it must walk here below to a happy death and to the everlasting sight of her glory in

heaven. The clear, searching light of eternity alone can reveal the many perils to our eternal and even our temporal welfare from which we have been saved through habitual recourse to the Virgin Mother of Good Counsel.

“O God, who gave us the Mother of Thy beloved Son to be our Mother, and who was pleased to give honor to her beautiful picture by a wonderful sign, we beseech Thee, that by ever following her counsel we may be able to live as Thou wouldst have us live and happily reach our heavenly country” (Collect of the Mass for the feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel).

MAY 3

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### *The Finding of the Holy Cross*

A.D. 326 (?)



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“But as for me, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

Like St. Paul the emperor Constantine found glory in the cross. Under the standard of the cross shown to him in the heavens as an omen of victory, Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Milvian bridge. After this victory, says tradition, St. Helena went to Jerusalem to search for the true cross of Christ.

“Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence, be Thy Mother my defense, be Thy cross my victory.”

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As Christ remained for three days in the tomb, so His cross lay hidden from the eyes of men for three centuries; today we celebrate its resurrection. “A cycle of ages finishes

at the Cross; a cycle of ages begins at the Cross." But far back in the history of humanity there can be found foreshadowings of this sign of "our salvation, life, and resurrection." For the ancient Egyptians the cross was the sign of life and health. When, in the battle of the Israelites against Amalec, Moses lifted his outstretched hands in prayer, the position was already a sign of victory; moreover, the victory seemed to depend upon his remaining faithful to the attitude imposed by the cross. Yet, even though the cross appears to have been deeply imbedded in the traditions of humanity before it was set up on Golgotha, it was only when the type had been replaced by the reality and Calvary had taken place in history that the voice from heaven said to Constantine, "In this sign, conquer!"

According to a tradition dating from the fifth century, St. Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine, came to Jerusalem in response to a revelation she had received in a dream to seek the cross of Christ and His sacred tomb. The pagan buildings that profaned the site of the holy sepulcher were destroyed and the whole area excavated. At length, three crosses and other instruments of the passion were found, hidden in a cistern; but since, according to one tradition, the "title" had been detached from the cross of Christ, identification was impossible. Hereupon, we are told by certain early Christian writers, St. Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, who had zealously co-operated with the search, had the crosses taken to the bedside of a dying woman. The touch of two of the crosses produced no effect, but contact with the third, that upon which our Savior died, restored the sick woman to health. A large portion of the true cross, enclosed in a silver reliquary was then kept in Jerusalem at the place of the Crucifixion. The remainder was sent to

Constantine who placed it in the church of the Holy Cross-in-Jerusalem, which he had built at Rome.

The spirit of the cross, of Christ crucified, is the spirit of charity, patience, forgiveness of injuries, love of suffering, and all the virtues which our Savior preached to us from the cross. Insofar as self-love, pride, sensuality, impatience find any place in us, thus far are we strangers to the spirit of Christ and enemies of His cross. Like St. Paul we should glory only in the cross of Christ, for it is only through the cross that Christ conquers and reigns in our souls. Moreover, do not our trials, like relics of the true cross, become themselves holy and sacred after passing through the compassionate Heart of Jesus? We should, therefore, venerate and love them. Glory be to thee, O Holy Cross, adorable mystery of love! O Jesus Crucified, accomplish in me that union of sacrifice and triumph whereby You Yourself conquer and reign. *Christus vincit! Christus regnat! Christus imperat!*

Faithful cross, O tree all beauteous,  
Tree all peerless and divine!  
Not a grove on earth can show us  
Such a leaf and flower as thine.  
Sweet the nails and sweet the wood,  
Laden with so sweet a load.

.....

Tree which solely wast found worthy  
Earth's great Victim to sustain,  
Harbor from the raging tempest,  
Ark that saved the world again,  
Tree with sacred blood anointed  
Of the Lamb for sinners slain.



JUNE 14

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*St. Basil the Great*

A.D. 329-379



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“She will exalt him above his fellows; in the assembly she will make him eloquent. Joy and gladness he will find, an everlasting name inherit” (Ecclus. 15:5-6).

The Latin Church celebrates the feast of St. Basil, one of the four great Doctors of the East on the traditional date of his consecration as bishop, while the Greek Church observes January 1, the date of his death.

O great St. Basil, obtain for me the grace of an invincible faith and of zeal for religious perfection.

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St. Basil, son and grandson of saints, was one of a family of nine surviving children, among whom were St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Macrina the Younger, and St. Peter of Sebaste. This strenuous champion of the faith well deserves his place in the liturgy of the Pentecostal season, for it was his inspired exposition of doctrine that prepared the way for the condemnation of the heresy of Macedonius, who had directed against the Third Person of the Trinity the same arguments invented by Arius against the divinity of the Word. Furthermore, St. Basil, when he was only a lector, did not hesitate to differ openly with his bishop, who had been led astray by the Arians. And when he himself became Bishop of Caesarea and Metropolitan of Cappadocia, he stood firm against both the promises and the threats of the Arian emperor Valens rather than compromise the true faith for the

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sake of peace and personal safety. Yet, before the end of his life, he found himself, as chief defender of orthodoxy in the East after the death of St. Athanasius, misunderstood and misrepresented even within the household of the faith, and accused of ambition and heresy.

From his youth, St. Basil's ruling desire had been to lead the monastic life. He gave up a promising career as an already successful professor of rhetoric in his native city to serve God in evangelical poverty. With the disciples who gathered around him in his retreat on the bank of the river Iris in Pontus, he organized the first true monasteries in the East, and drew up for their guidance the famous Rule, or Basilian Code. Down the centuries to the present day this Basilian Code has regulated the lives of Oriental and Slavonic monks and it also exerted a powerful influence upon the monastic rule of St. Benedict, the father of Western monasticism. But his longing for the monastic life did not lessen St. Basil's zeal for his pastoral duties when he was made Bishop of Caesarea; rather, it led him to make of his own archdiocese a model of ecclesiastical order and discipline. He himself set the example by his personal austerity and his care for his flock. Morning and evening, even on working days, he preached in his church to the crowds that gathered eagerly to hear him, for St. Basil was one of the most eloquent orators the Church has produced. He also established the custom of assembling in the church before sunrise for devotions and the chanting of psalms.

In charitable works for the bodily welfare of his people, Basil was equally zealous. During a season of drought followed by famine in his diocese he distributed the whole of his maternal inheritance to provide for the needy and organized a vast system of relief. For the benefit of the sick

poor of his flock he built in the suburbs of Caesarea a hospital so extensive and elaborate that it was called the "New Town." Numerous other hospitals for the poor as well as refuges and orphanages were also founded by him in Cappadocia and throughout the region of Pontus. All these varied charitable works along with a most rigorous personal asceticism were carried on despite chronic ill-health. The indomitable spirit of St. Basil made his body, feeble though it was, a mighty instrument of magnificent and enduring work for Christ and His Church in an age of exceptionally violent world convulsions. Finally, worn out by austerity, hard work, and illness, St. Basil died at the age of forty-nine years, having become, in the words of a fifth-century bishop, Theodoret of Cyrus, "the light not only of Cappadocia, but of the whole world."

"Graciously hear, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the prayers we offer to Thee on this festival day of blessed Basil, Thy confessor and bishop; he deserved to render Thee a worthy service; may his merits appeal to Thee and absolve us from all our sins" (Collect).

JUNE 21

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*St. Aloysius Gonzaga*

A.D. 1568-1591



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"For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years. Rather, understanding is the heavy crown for man, and an unsullied life, the attainment of old age" (Wisd. 4:8-9).

In the sense of these words, St. Aloysius must be given a place

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among the ancients; for although he died in his twenty-fourth year, he had *in a short space . . . fulfilled a long time.*

St. Aloysius, obtain for me a great increase in your most eminent virtues: purity, mortification, and charity.

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At the age of eight years Aloysius was placed in the court of Francesco de' Medici in Florence. At twelve, in Brescia, he came under the spiritual guidance of St. Charles Borromeo, and from him he received his First Holy Communion. The following year he accompanied his father to Spain where Aloysius and his brother were made pages of James, the son of Philip II. While at the Spanish court Aloysius formed the resolution of becoming a Jesuit. After his return to Italy in 1584 he took steps to carry out this decision, in spite of vigorous opposition from his father. His short life in the Society of Jesus was terminated by the plague which swept Italy in 1591. Aloysius had caught the disease while catechizing and tending the patients in a hospital opened by the Jesuits in Rome for the plague victims. He recovered from the first attack, but subsequently died of the effects of the disease.

Three virtues especially shone in this holy youth: purity, mortification, and charity. Purity was St. Aloysius' special virtue and distinctive characteristic. He surrounded his innocence with precautions which we might be tempted to think exaggerated; yet by means of them he remained angelically chaste. Who can say whether he would have remained so if he had been less austere? Reflection upon the extraordinary energy of St. Aloysius in mortifying his passions puts to shame our own cowardice and slothfulness in this respect. He kept his senses under constant strict control, foregoing numberless small satisfactions that he might innocently have

permitted himself. His frail body was subjected to the most cruel instruments of penance. Moreover, so complete was the mastery he had gained over his thoughts and imaginations that he could say, "No thought comes to me other than the one I desire; no image presents itself to me other than the one I seek." The natural liveliness of his temperament was so well disciplined that he seemed to have been born without passions. Self-seeking he conquered by attacking it in its principal source, self-esteem. Reflection upon the evil tendencies which his insight into his own soul revealed to him led to such complete self-contempt that he expressed astonishment that such as he had been admitted into the Society of Jesus.

The secret, impelling motive, in all his mortifications and pursuit of purity was love, the love of God. None of his austerities caused him so much pain as his inability to suffer more for God. The sight of a crucifix transfixed him with a dart of love, so that he would remain absorbed in contemplation of the sufferings of Jesus. Before the tabernacle his flaming love burned with a special ardor; it was only at the call of obedience that he left the presence of his Lord. The reward of this life which consumed itself in the fires of divine charity was revealed in vision to St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi. "How exceedingly great is the glory of Aloysius, son of Ignatius," she exclaimed! "Never could I have conceived of it, if my Jesus had not shown it to me. Never could I have believed that such glory was to be seen, even in heaven." Yet, how short was the life of St. Aloysius! To the superficial glance it offers only the preliminaries of a career, broken off, as one might say, before ever bearing fruit. The glory of this great saint was all within. Yet the brilliant accomplishments of his fellow

Jesuits, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis Borgia, were also but the external evidence of interior and hidden virtues. External works count with God only in proportion to the interior impulse that inspires them.

“O God, who, in distributing Thy heavenly gifts, united in the angelic youth Aloysius wonderful innocence of life with an equal spirit of penance, grant through his merits and prayers, that we who have not followed him in his innocence, may imitate him in his penance” (Collect).

JULY 1

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*The Precious Blood of Our Savior*



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“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer sanctify the unclean unto the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the Holy Spirit offered himself unblemished unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebr. 9:13, 14.)

Adore the precious blood flowing from the opened heart of Jesus. O Jesus, grant me such dispositions of soul as will merit for me a greater share in the fruits of the Mass and the grace of the Sacraments.

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By divine decree the shedding of blood was made a condition for the pardon promised to mankind; but the blood had to be that of a rational victim, since it was man who had sinned. The victim must also be innocent, and his atonement had to have infinite value. These conditions were all

fulfilled in Jesus the Divine Victim who deigned to shed His innocent and precious blood for us. Profound mysteries are presented to us in the shedding of the blood of Jesus, especially in the precious blood that flowed from the wound in His side. The Fathers of the Church saw in it the accomplishment of another figure: As Eve was drawn from Adam's side during sleep, so the new Eve, the Church, with two of her principal sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, symbolized by the water and the blood, emerged from Jesus' opened side. Both these sacraments incorporate us into Christ, Baptism infusing into us the light of grace, and the Eucharist providing us with the means of preserving and fostering this divine life. At the command of God Moses struck the rock of Horeb and from it flowed abundant water to quench the thirst of the people of Israel. *They drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, but the rock was Christ*, says St. Paul. This rock and these waters which quench the thirst of a whole nation are Jesus' side and the mercies which flow therefrom upon all who have recourse to Him.

The application of the merits of the precious blood is made daily through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments. They are as channels whereby the blood of Jesus flows upon our souls. By the power of this divine and infinitely precious blood the wounds we continually inflict upon our souls are healed, the fire of our passions is extinguished, peace is restored to us, and merit is imparted to our actions. Thomas à Kempis says, "So burning is it, the blood of Christ poured out through love, that it mightily inflames him that deeply meditates thereon, and makes him so forgetful of self, as to deem contempt joy and to regard as nothing the things that are painful to the body. For thus the ardent lover commences to be made like his dear Be-

loved through suffering, while he wholly and freely abandons himself to Him who for his redemption spared Himself in naught. Hence springs a very strong love, most grateful comfort is received, a singular devotion grows; carnal affection dies, the spirit is raised to God; the understanding is enlightened; and the word of the prophet is realized, *My chalice which inebriateth me, how goodly is it!*"

O Jesus, I adore Your precious blood pouring down upon the earth and I offer it to the Adorable Trinity for the remission of my sins and for those of the whole world. Grant that it may purify my soul, move my will, regulate my passions, and heal all my wounds. Glory be to the blood of Jesus both now and for evermore and through everlasting ages!

JULY 2

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### *The Visitation of Our Lady to St. Elizabeth*



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"Now in those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town of Juda. And she entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth" (Lk. 1:39-40).

The words of Gabriel announcing to Mary that Elizabeth had conceived despite her advanced age and previous barrenness prompted Mary's visit to her cousin. Doubtless she was interiorly enlightened as to the relations which united the child of Elizabeth to her own divine Son and as to the grace her visit was to bring to John the Precursor.

O Mary, teach me how to serve others and manifest Christ to them with charity and eagerness like yours.

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The mystery of the Visitation represents the first revelation of the Incarnation and the first application of its graces. Through the Incarnation grace had been brought to earth and Jesus wished to begin immediately to distribute it. Since it was impossible for Him to go to John Himself He inspired His Mother to conduct Him. *Mary arose and went with haste*, says St. Luke. She obeyed with her habitual alacrity where the least sign of the divine good pleasure was concerned. Moreover, Christ was being formed in her and the sudden urgency of her impulse of love was His impulse. Yet, it is not likely that Mary left Nazareth at once. For a journey of three or four days such as this, she would have to wait until arrangements for an escort could be made. A relative or neighbor would have to accompany her or she could join a caravan of pilgrims going to Jerusalem. But in either case the journey on a donkey from Nazareth in Galilee to the hill country in southern Judea would be neither comfortable nor easy.

In addition to Mary's charitable eagerness in this toilsome undertaking at a time when she also was bearing a burden, we marvel at the humility and goodness with which she, the Mother of God, paid this visit to the mother of her Son's servant. At the sound of her voice as she saluted Elizabeth the infant in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy, and the grace that thus came to him was communicated to his mother, so that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and by a special light the reality and nature of the Incarnation was revealed to her. "*Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!*" cried Elizabeth in a loud voice. She continued the salutation of the angel as if she had listened in spirit to his words in the little house at Nazareth. Then using words similar to those that will be

spoken by her son when Jesus will come to him to be baptized, she said, "*And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*"

Elizabeth was the first to honor Mary publicly after the Incarnation and her sentiments of respect and homage continue to find expression on the lips of all generations as part of the *Hail Mary*. Not only was Elizabeth the first to practice devotion to Mary, but she sets us an example of how we should practice it. Her homage was both interior and exterior; she honored Mary by sentiments, words, and actions. She also gave us three principal motives for our devotion, namely, Mary's dignity as Mother of God, for Elizabeth called her *the mother of my Lord* and proclaimed blessed the fruit of her womb; Mary's privileges and graces, which Elizabeth summarized when she called Mary blessed among women; and Mary's holiness, which Elizabeth places especially in her spirit of faith: "*And blessed is she who has believed.*"

"Hail Mary, Mother of God, it is thanks to thee that the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb, and that the torch was lowered before the Light that can never be extinguished.

"Hail Mary, Mother of God, it is through thee that the ineffable kindness of our God, of which the Apostle tells, has appeared amongst men.

"Hail Mary, Mother of God, it is from thee that has appeared the true Light, who says of Himself, '*I am the light of the world*'" (from the *Encomium ad Deiparam* of St. Cyril of Alexandria, delivered in A.D. 431 at the Council of Ephesus).

JULY 16

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*Our Lady of Mount Carmel*



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“For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice he hath covered me” (Isa. 61:10).

The commemoration of Blessed Mary the Virgin of Mount Carmel was instituted by the Carmelite friars in the fourteenth century to celebrate the victory of the Order over its enemies. The feast occurs on July 16 because on that date, according to Carmelite tradition, our Lady appeared to St. Simon Stock and gave him the scapular.

O Mary, Queen of Mount Carmel, help me to wear the scapular as an external sign that your own beautiful mantle covers my soul.

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In one of the lessons of the Office for the feast we are told how the disciples of the prophets Elias and Eliseus, who resided on Mount Carmel, became Christians at the first preaching of the Apostles, and, being privileged to see the Blessed Virgin herself and hear her words, felt their veneration immensely increased. And so, returning to their beloved mountain, they built an oratory to the Virgin Mary on the very spot whence Elias had seen the little cloud rise out of the sea, the sign that a long-continued drought was at an end and a figure also of the fecundity of the Mother of God. These disciples, continues the tradition, were called the Brothers of the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel. Whether or not the present Order of Carmel can be traced to the prophet Elias, it appears certain that special relations between the Order as it exists today and Mount Carmel date back

at least to the thirteenth century. The Mohammedan persecutions in Palestine during the thirteenth century forced the hermits of Mount Carmel to leave the beloved cradle of their Order and seek refuge in the West. But Mary was watching over her clients, for one never serves in vain the Queen of heaven. In a vision she directed the Vicar of Christ to show them special benevolence. Thanks to his protection and that of his successor, the Carmelites spread rapidly in Italy, France, and England.

Then Mary accorded the whole Order a new and extraordinary proof of her favor in the person of the sixth General of the Carmelites, St. Simon Stock. We are told that she appeared to him and, giving him the scapular, said, "Take, beloved son, this scapular of thy Order as a badge of my confraternity and for thee and all Carmelites a special sign of grace; whoever dies in this garment will not suffer everlasting fire. It is a sign of salvation, a safeguard in dangers, a pledge of peace and of the covenant." Indirectly, this promise is extended to all who, from devotion to the Mother of God, wear her habit or badge until death, and who are thus affiliated, as it were, to the Order of Carmel. All who, being duly invested with the habit or badge of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, constantly wear it out of true veneration and love for Mary and practice fidelity to the duties of their state will enjoy her special protection.

One who wears the scapular, therefore, testifies his special dedication to the service of Mary. What this consecration implies is well shown in the Gospel of the Mass for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The Gospel speaks of the woman in the crowd who lifted up her voice and blessed the womb of Mary. She was thinking of a natural motherhood, and not of the divine maternity, which involved

Mary's supernatural and meritorious consent. Therefore, our Savior answered, "*Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.*" It was precisely by hearing the word of God and keeping it that Mary became the Mother of the Savior. Likewise, her servants must, in imitation of her, spiritually conceive the same Word by hearing Him with faith and bring Him forth in the performance of good works. "O most blessed Virgin Immaculate, the beauty and splendor of Carmel, you who regard with eyes of special love those who wear your scapular, look kindly upon me and spread over me the mantle of your maternal protection. Strengthen my weakness with your power, illuminate the darkness of my mind with your wisdom, increase in me the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Adorn my soul with such graces and virtues that it may be ever dear to your divine Son and to you" (from a prayer indulgenced by Leo XIII).

JULY 19

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*St. Vincent de Paul*

A.D. 1580(?)–1660



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"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is of any avail, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works through charity" (Gal. 5:6).

The charity of St. Vincent de Paul was founded upon faith. He loved the poor because he loved God whom his faith beheld in the poor; herein is the starting point and the explanation of all that he did for the Church.

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O most charitable St. Vincent de Paul, teach me how to serve others with love and in the spirit of faith.

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In the Collect of the Mass commemorating the saint whom we honor today, the Church praises especially his apostolic zeal for the Christian education of the poor of France and for the honor of the priesthood. Born of a middle-class family in a village of Gascony, St. Vincent de Paul worked hard even in childhood helping his parents on their small farm. Works of mercy seem to have been characteristic of him from the very beginning, for as a child he began giving food and clothing to the poor whom he met. When his father discovered that Vincent possessed more than average intelligence he sent him, despite his slender means, to nearby Dax for the humanities. Theological studies followed, first at Toulouse and then at Saragossa in Spain. After his ordination and the doctorate in theology, as Vincent was sailing from Marseilles to Narbonne to claim an important legacy, he was taken prisoner by Turkish pirates who were at that time harassing the Mediterranean coasts. After some years of bondage in Algeria, Vincent made his escape together with his master, a renegade Catholic, whom he had brought back to the faith.

Upon his return to France, Vincent became curé of Clichy near Paris and here began his apostolic ministry. Foundations of his charitable works were spread by his own efforts or those of his followers, especially the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Priests of the Missions, to other parts of France and of Europe, and thence to America and the Orient. His zeal embraced convicts, galley slaves, abandoned children, and the sick poor. "It is God Himself," he would say, "who receives the gifts of your charity; and is

it not a supreme happiness to give Him what belongs to Him and what we have received from His bounty?" With tireless zeal he continued even in his old age preaching to the poor, especially to country people. At a time when abuses among the members of the priesthood were growing, St. Vincent labored ceaselessly in promoting regular discipline among the clergy, building seminaries, writing numerous spiritual and theological treatises, and giving retreats preparatory to ordination.

But St. Vincent's greatest gift to the priests of France was his personal example of uprightness, humility, and single-hearted devotion to the greater glory of God. "Let us honor the hidden state of the Son of God," he once wrote. "There is our center; there is what He requires of us for the present, for the future, for ever; unless His divine Majesty makes known in His own unmistakable way that He demands something else of us. Let us especially honor this divine Master's moderation in action. He would not always do all that He could do, in order to teach us to be satisfied when it is not expedient to do all that we are able, but only so much as is seasonable to charity and conformable to the will of God." What a lesson to our feverish zeal from a man whose life was so full and whose work prospered so marvelously! How often human pretensions, outstripping Providence, so to speak, sterilize grace! But the other part of St. Vincent de Paul's secret is that once the divine impulse was given he did not tolerate the least delay in following it, and he did not permit either in himself or in his co-laborers any other sentiment than absolute confidence. Contradictions and provocations he met with seemingly unalterable meekness and patience, although he tells us that he was "by nature of a choleric temperament and very subject to anger." Such

was the fruit of the victory gained over self-love by co-operation with grace.

“O God, who, for the preaching of the gospel to the poor and for promoting the honor of the priesthood, endowed blessed Vincent with the zeal of an apostle, grant, we humbly pray, that we, who venerate his holy life, may profit by the examples of virtue he has left us” (Collect).

JULY 26

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*St. Anne, Mother of Our Lady*



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“*Sic fingit tabernaculum Deo*” (“Thus she fashions a tabernacle for God”).

These words were inscribed around the figure of St. Anne instructing Mary, which formed the armorial device of the medieval guild of joiners and cabinetmakers.

Good St. Anne, mother of her who is our life, our sweetness, and our hope, obtain for me generosity in the service of God.

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Nothing certain is known of the earthly life of St. Anne and her husband, St. Joachim. But whatever the fortunes of their life in this world, they could have no greater claim to our veneration and love than that expressed by their sublime vocation. A high honor was bestowed upon St. Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, who was privileged to have her son sanctified in her womb; but how much greater was the dignity of St. Anne, whose child from the first instant of her conception was preserved by a special prerogative from all taint of sin! Well might St. John Damascene exclaim,



“Blessed, thrice blessed art thou, O St. Anne, who didst receive from God and bring forth the blessed child from whom proceeded Christ, the Flower of life!” Moreover, if the graces given to each one are suited to the vocation to which he is destined by God, St. Anne, chosen by God to give birth to the holiest of His creatures, must have received from heaven the most exalted supernatural gifts.

Veneration of St. Anne is intimately related to veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The feasts of Mary’s nativity and of her presentation in the Temple are also feasts of St. Anne. Praises offered to the daughter are also directed to the mother. Mary herself surpasses all the faithful in the esteem and filial love of her holy mother. The bond that united the hearts of Anne and Mary during their life on earth has not been severed in heaven. Rather, it has been drawn still closer in an indissoluble union which lasts for eternity. “Those who honor St. Anne,” our Lady is said to have promised one of her clients, “will obtain strong aid in every need, especially at the hour of death.” To another of her children Mary is said to have revealed that honor shown St. Anne is doubly pleasing to herself. If we wish to give our Lady special joy we might well repeat the words of a pious hermit, who added to every salutation he directed to the Queen of heaven the words, “And blessed be thy sweet mother Anne from whom thou didst assume thy virginal flesh.”

St. Anne is the great protectress and model of parents and also of those otherwise charged with the education of children. Like her daughter she is also the “Health of the Sick.” Countless cures of body and soul have been wrought through her intercession. St. Thomas Aquinas assures us that the privilege of aiding mankind in every distress has been given

to St. Anne. We cannot doubt her willingness to use her great power in our behalf, for, as St. John Damascene says, "St. Anne is a generous mother, a compassionate mother, a gracious mother, because the name "Anne" means "generous," "merciful," "gracious."

Hail, illustrious St. Anne, blessed among women, for you had the happiness of bearing in your womb the holy and immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God. O glorious St. Anne, beseech Jesus and Mary to impart to me love and courage to serve God faithfully as you did. Be my advocate and protectress with your well-beloved daughter and her Son, Jesus; for if I am fortunate enough to find favor with you, O holy mother Anne, I may expect everything from your intercession.

JULY 31

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*St. Ignatius Loyola*

A.D. 1491-1556



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"I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Lk. 12:49.)

In the inscrutable designs of His providence God permits His cause on earth to be misunderstood and endangered; He intends that we should defend His interests and make them victorious. The great lesson taught us by St. Ignatius Loyola is that circumstances are never so hopeless that we are unable to promote the greater glory of God.

O great St. Ignatius, help me to become a worthy soldier of Christ, wholly dedicated to promoting His greater glory.

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St. Ignatius, a Spanish nobleman of Loyola and soldier of Ferdinand the Catholic, was granted the grace of conversion while recuperating from a wound received at the siege of Pampeluna. Upon recovery he hung his soldier's arms before the altar of our Lady at Montserrat, and after a night spent in prayer took up his knightly service in the army of Jesus Christ. There followed a year of solitude and rigorous austerity at Manresa during which time also St. Ignatius composed that great manual of Christian asceticism, the *Spiritual Exercises*.

This was the period of Luther's open revolt against the Church; Calvin was already recruiting secretly the future Huguenots; and the year 1534 was to see the rupture of all England with the Holy See. It was a moment for the faint-hearted to declare that all was lost, but it was also a moment for the strong in faith and hope to come to the assistance of the Church. Against the proud standards of the freethinkers was raised the banner of Ignatius, bearing the legend, "To the greater glory of God!" No obstacle daunted him. In order to fit himself the better for gaining souls, he determined to acquire the education he lacked. Although he was now over thirty years of age, he began to study the elements of Latin grammar with the children of Barcelona. After further study at other schools in Spain, he went to the University of Paris to continue his training in philosophy and theology. Here a little band of companions gathered about him, St. Francis Xavier among them, and on August 15, 1534, the foundations of the Society of Jesus were laid in a small chapel on the hill of Montmartre, as St. Ignatius and his little group of disciples dedicated their lives to God.

To the disobedience and anarchy which were devastating their world, the members of the Society opposed the solid

ranks of order and obedience. Perfect obedience and self-denial were conspicuous virtues in St. Ignatius himself, and they constituted the first lessons he inculcated in his novices. The extraordinary graces of prayer which he received stemmed from his constant practice of self-abnegation and bodily austerity. At Manresa he had spent seven hours daily on his knees in mental prayer, and thus he received such vivid lights concerning the greatest mysteries of religion that he declared he would have shed his blood in their defense even if they were not found in the Gospel. As Superior of the Society of Jesus he submitted to his inferiors with meekness when he could do so without detriment to necessary authority. "The virtue of obedience," he wrote to his Portuguese novices, "brings forth and nourishes all other virtues." True obedience, he taught, must reach the understanding as well as the will and never permit even a secret complaint or censure of a superior's precept. And so strongly was St. Ignatius impressed with the importance of self-denial that upon hearing a certain person spoken of as a man of prayer and eminently favored with the grace of contemplation, he said, "Call him rather a man of the most perfect self-denial"; implying by these words the truth that the Holy Spirit communicates Himself only to a heart that is empty of itself.

"O God, who for the spreading of the greater glory of Thy name, by means of blessed Ignatius, strengthened Thy Church militant with a new army, grant that by his aid and by his example we may so fight on earth as to become worthy to be crowned with him in heaven" (Collect).

*Dedication of St. Mary of the Snow*



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“Hail, holy Mother, thou who didst bring forth the King who ruleth heaven and earth for ever” (Introit of the Mass for the feast of the Dedication of St. Mary of the Snow).

The Basilica of St. Mary Major (St. Mary of the Snow) was built in the mid-fourth century in the reign of Pope Liberius and named after him, the Basilica of Liberius. A century later it was rebuilt and dedicated by Pope Sixtus III to the Virgin Mary, whom the Council of Ephesus had just proclaimed the Mother of God.

“Vouchsafe that I may praise thee, O sacred Virgin” in my life of consecration to you.

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The Basilica of St. Mary Major is so called because it is in both age and dignity the first church of Rome among those dedicated to God in honor of His holy Mother. According to a popular tradition the original church was built on the Esquiline hill by a wealthy Roman and his wife during the pontificate of Liberius. They were guided in their choice of a site, continues the legend, by an apparition of our Lady and a miraculous fall of snow during the same night, in the intense heat of a Roman August. A few years later, the manger from the stable of Bethlehem in which the Infant Jesus had been laid was also placed in this church, so that it gained a second title, namely, St. Mary of the Crib.

In celebrating the feast of the Dedication of St. Mary Major, the Church intends to reanimate our confidence in our Lady. In every age the Christian faithful have sent up

their cries of love, filial confidence, and admiration to Mary, expressing their homage in all the forms of art. The architecture of the Middle Ages, especially, has been defined as "an act of faith in the Virgin translated into stone." Our Lady, in turn, has always exercised upon the hearts of those devoted to her a refining and profoundly appeasing influence. Frederic Ozanam, after seeing the medieval cathedral dedicated to our Lady in Burgos, Spain, wrote:

"O Notre Dame of Burgos! You are also Notre Dame of Pisa and Milan, Notre Dame of Cologne and of Paris, of Amiens and of Chartres! . . . You are beautiful and gracious, *pulchra es et decora*, since the mere thought of you has made grace and beauty descend into the works of men. As barbarians these men came out of their forests and, burners of cities as they were, they seemed made only to destroy. You made them so gentle that they have bent their heads beneath the stones; they have yoked themselves to heavily loaded carts; they have obeyed masters, in order to build your churches. You have made them so patient that they have taken no heed of the centuries in order to hew beautiful portals, galleries, and spires for you. You have made them so bold that the height of their basilicas leaves far behind the most ambitious edifices of the Romans and, at the same time, so chaste that these great architectural creations, with their statuary people, breathe only purity and immaterial love. You have disarmed a great number who found glory only in spilling blood; instead of a sword, you have given them a trowel . . . and for three hundred years you have kept them in their peaceful workshops. O Notre Dame, how well God has rewarded the humility of His handmaid! In return for the poor house of Nazareth where you lodged your Son, what rich dwellings He has given you!"

But before there were temples of stone built in Mary's honor, there were altars erected to her in every Christian heart. From the beginning the Church has taught her children to see in Mary "the Mother of grace and pity" and to place their confidence in her mediation. It is impossible for us to give Mary too large a place in our devotion. Living the life of complete consecration to her is the most direct means of living in Christ.

"O holy Virgin, Mother of God, Queen of men and of angels, marvel of heaven and of earth, I revere thee in every way that I can according to God. . . . I offer thee my soul and my life, and I desire to belong to thee forever and to pay thee some special homage and mark of dependence in time and eternity. Mother of grace and mercy, I choose thee for the Mother of my soul, in honor of God's good pleasure in choosing thee for His Mother" (from a prayer of Cardinal de Berulle).

AUGUST 15

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*The Assumption of Our Lady Into Heaven*



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"Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone" (Cant. 2:10-11).

"No pain in childbirth, no suffering in death, no dissolution in the grave, for no tomb could retain her whom earth had never sullied"; thus did the ancient Gallican liturgy formulate the doctrine of the Assumption of our Lady, centuries before it was officially proclaimed by the Church as a dogma of faith.

O august Virgin Mary, help me to serve God with care and

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fidelity in each of my actions, that I may merit a glorious resurrection.

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In the resurrection and glorification of the Mother of God we have a new pledge of our own resurrection. And like Mary we should merit and prepare here below the future glory of our body. The glorious clothing which we are to wear in heaven has been woven for us by Jesus Himself through the Incarnation and Redemption. It is made of His grace; but we, on our side, must co-operate with Him by fruitfully applying His grace to every action of our lives. As with Mary, there should be no part of our body that has not served Jesus with perfect devotion and we should endeavor, above all, to acquire and preserve virginal purity of heart; this will be among the most beautiful jewels of our celestial attire.

As Mary rises, body and soul, toward heaven, Jesus goes forth in all His glory attended by the angels and saints to welcome her, His Virgin Mother. We can only dimly guess at the splendors of Mary's reception, but we express all when we say that the triumph of Mary resembled the triumph of her divine Son, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Indeed, her coming was for Jesus as a second entrance into His kingdom, an entrance even more splendid than the first; for the first was not graced by the presence of Mary. But now the God-Man re-enters the kingdom of heaven, escorting His beloved Mother, *who comes forth like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as resplendent as the sun.*

Mary's coronation in heaven is the climax of this mystery; for her it is the festival of festivals, celebrated with a magnificence which dims to nothingness all the beauties of earth. And this, Mary's first day in eternity, will have no end.



Forever Mary reigns from the throne near that of the Trinity and dwells forever in a plenitude of glory which answers to the plenitude of her graces and merits; after the divine glory there is none greater than hers. And so great is her joy in the possession of the Sovereign Good and in the realization of her dignity and power, that it overflows and diffuses itself throughout heaven and earth. So far-reaching is her authority that it extends over all creation; all things are submissive to Mary. She is the Dispenser of the riches of grace and virtue, the vigilant Guardian of the kingdom of her Son — *terrible as an army set in array*. How can we ever lose confidence when we have so powerful an advocate as Mary? For Mary is ours, she is of our race, the one complete human person in heaven. Unimaginably great and exalted as she is, she still remains our Mother, poor banished children of Eve. Our place is at her feet, and no one will take it away from us — she, least of all!

“I saw her when, fair as a dove, she took her flight above the rivers of waters. The priceless odor of her perfumes was heavy in her garments. And about her it was as the flowers of roses in the springtide and of lilies of the valleys.”

“Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who believed the Lord: those things have been accomplished in you, which were told you; behold, you are exalted above the choirs of angels: intercede for us with the Lord our God” (responses from the second Nocturn for the feast).

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*The Immaculate Heart of Mary*

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“Come let us adore Jesus our love and our life, reigning in the Heart of Mary” (invitatory of Matins from the Office of the Admirable Heart of Mary).

“The Heart of Mary,” said Bossuet, “is the first source of the blood of Jesus; it is here that this beautiful river of grace has its source and flows into our veins through the sacraments, carrying the spirit of life into the whole body of the Church.”

O Mary, my Mother, teach me how to fulfill your desires and those of Jesus by my practice of the devotion to your Immaculate Heart.

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The incomparable Heart of Mary, Mother of our Savior, is a most precious and radiant mirror in which Jesus, the eternal Sun, is faithfully reflected in all His beauty and perfection. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are as one and the same Heart. When St. Catherine Labouré asked our Lady, at the order of her director, what words should be inscribed upon the face of the medal bearing the image of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, she was told that no words were needed; the union of the two Hearts expressed all that was to be conveyed.

We can never comprehend the holiness of the Heart of Mary in which the Eternal Father prepared a dwelling for His only-begotten Son and in which the Holy Spirit celebrated His ineffable espousals. God must needs have united therein the purity of Susanna, the fortitude of Judith, the piety of Esther, the faith of Abraham, all the hope in the hearts

of the prophets, all the heroism of the martyrs, all the innocence of the virgins. Think of the infusion of grace Mary's heart must have received during the nine months which the Incarnate Word passed in her chaste womb; with what fire it must have been enkindled by that Sun confined so long within it! Think of the constantly increasing holiness of Mary's heart during the thirty years of daily and mutual confidences between her and her dear Jesus and during the three years of His apostolate, the least details of which she pondered with boundless delight. Mary's mind was always nourished on divine thoughts, her heart fed always on divine love, her body obeyed always the inspirations of her higher faculties. Always, in sentiments, desires, actions, she fully and immediately responded to her sublime titles: Daughter of the Eternal Father, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Mother of the Son of God. It is impossible to set forth in words the virtues and perfections of Mary. We can only say to her with the archangel Gabriel, "*Hail, full of grace!*"

But, while Mary lived only for her dear Son and while her heart beat only for Him, the gigantic sum of her love was expended not only upon the Incarnate Word, but also upon each member of His Mystical Body. Our highest conception of maternal love can give us only a feeble image of the love and tenderness of Mary's heart for each individual soul, since the moment at the foot of the cross when she became our Mother and took us for her children. It was as if Jesus said to her then, "New Eve, here is your family. You are henceforth the true Mother of all the living. You have born all these children in your sorrow and I wish you to love them as you have loved me." And in speaking to John it is as if Jesus said to us, "Most happy children of Adam, here is your new Mother. I yield to you all my

rights over her; have recourse to her in all your needs. If her womb did not bear you, her heart has given birth to you in this great hour; and if anything could equal my tenderness for you, it would be her own." Before such infinite charity and so great a blessing, what can we do but bow down in humble adoration and thanksgiving!

"Dearest Jesus, what thanks we owe Thine infinite goodness for having given Thy Blessed Mother to us and for having endowed her with a maternal heart so full of love and tenderness toward her most unworthy children! Grant, dear Savior, that we may have a truly filial affection for so good a Mother, and that the hearts of her children may bear the image and likeness of the charity, humility, and all the other virtues that reign in the Heart of their most loving Mother. O most loving Heart of Mary, may every human and angelic heart recognize and honor thee as its Sovereign after the adorable Heart of our Savior!" (St. John Eudes)

SEPTEMBER 8

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### *The Nativity of Our Lady*



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"Let us celebrate the birthday of the Virgin Mary. Let us adore the Lord Christ, her Son" (invitatory of Matins for the feast).

The Church joyfully proclaims the divine maternity by uniting in her chants of praise the birth of Jesus and the birth of Mary. St. Peter Damien calls the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady "the beginning of salvation, the origin of every feast, for, behold, the Mother of the Bridegroom is born."

O Mary, help me to gather practical fruits of devotion to you from this meditation.

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Our own birth was sad because we came into this world stained by original sin and our coming was attended by the pangs of our mothers and our own cries. Mary's birth, on the contrary, was the occasion of great joy to heaven and earth. The Holy Trinity Itself rejoiced in the birth of Mary: the Eternal Father, because in the newborn infant He beheld the Immaculate Virgin Mother who, participating in His fecundity, was to bring forth incarnate the Word whom He begets eternally; the Divine Word, because she who was to clothe Him with a human body, that He might become a Victim of expiation, had finally appeared; the Holy Spirit, because His living temple was now ready, whom He was to enrich with the plenitude of His Gifts and make the channel of His graces. The angels exulted with joy because it was at last given to them to see their future Queen and the true Mother of all the living. The souls in limbo, also, were comforted by this sign of the near approach of their Liberator. Around the cradle of the infant Mary were gathered, as it were, the patriarchs, prophets, and kings of the Old Testament, greeting her with joy and rendering homage to her who was to crown their faith and their hope by giving the Messiah to the world.

The birth of Mary was glorious also by reason of the singular gifts and privileges accorded her. All was beautiful and holy in this truly royal child. Her body was so fair, innocent, and pure; and the beauty of her sinless soul was a thing so tremendous as to be utterly indescribable. After the work of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, the work of creating the soul of Mary was the greatest and most worthy

of Himself that the omnipotent God ever accomplished. Divine grace streamed upon Mary *like rain coming down on the meadow, like showers watering the earth*; and her soul absorbed it all without losing a drop. Already she was delighting all heaven with the homage of her adoration and love. The gaze of the Adorable Trinity which, since the fall of Adam, had seen nothing on earth but corruption and sin, could at last rest with complacency upon a holy and perfect human creature, who would never forfeit the grace and beauty with which she was adorned.

As Mary's birth was pure and lasting joy for God and heaven, so was it also for each one of us. Her birth marked the end of malediction for the earth and the restoration of peace between God and men. Let us salute her with joy, the dove bringing back to us the olive branch, the morning star, the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honor of our race! Let us reanimate our love and devotion toward Mary. In all ages the Christian faithful have found Jesus through Mary. Let us imitate their devotion and join all generations in proclaiming her blessed and increasing her glory.

O Mary, the mystery which was hidden from men at the time of your birth is not concealed from us. I know that you are my Mother, my Refuge, my Mediatrix before the divine Majesty. I know that you are the Help of Christians and the Health of the sick, the Gate of heaven and the Dispenser of the treasures of grace. Accept all the veneration of my heart, and obtain for me by your powerful intercession the graces that are most necessary for my soul.

## *The Holy Name of Mary*



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“And the virgin’s name was Mary” (Lk. 1:27).

After the feast of the Nativity of the Savior, the Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus; likewise, after observing the anniversary of our Mother’s birth, we honor her blessed name.

O Mary, enable me to taste the sweetness of your holy name and to place my trust in your unfailing protection.

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Throughout the Christian centuries Mary’s clients have meditated upon the various meanings of her holy name. It has been translated as “Lady” or “Queen,” “Star of the Sea,” “Scent of Myrrh,” “Beautiful” or “Gracious One.” But whatever the interpretation given it, the name of Mary is most beautiful and dear to us, because it is the name of her who is the highest and noblest human ideal and our beloved Queen and Mother. Mary is the ideal of the human race, because in her, unparalleled magnificence of natural and supernatural endowments were united with perfect simplicity. She was a world of beauty and harmony, containing all that was noble and excellent on earth and in heaven. Christian painting, music, poetry—all the arts have sought in Mary their highest inspiration and have vied with one another in extolling her beauty and excellence. Yet new marvels are ever being discovered in her, for Mary is an ideal of inexhaustible riches and variety. But, most often, the joy, the consolation, and sweetness tasted in the love of Mary remain

the secret of the heart, not to be expressed by any human medium. God be praised who has given us so much gladness in Mary!

Mary is the name of our Queen, the Queen of all queens, as Jesus is the King of kings. Her sovereignty is held by no merely honorary title, but she possesses a dominion that is real and legitimate. Since the Word, by whom all things were made, is Mary's Son, all belongs to her by reason of her maternity. All creatures who serve God serve Mary also. Her place is near the throne of the Savior, and all the hierarchies of saints and angels bow before her. Like the authority of Jesus, Mary's is limitless. Wherever her Son reigns and commands, she also reigns and commands; and like Jesus she uses her power for good and for the happiness of her subjects. There is no necessity she cannot relieve, no sorrow she cannot console, no grace she cannot obtain; and more than this, there is no soul who arrives at eternal salvation without her.

Mary is the name of our Mother. In the economy of salvation Mary is the second Eve as Jesus is the second Adam. Mary took the place of Eve in our spiritual life; in the fullest sense she merits the title "Mother of the living." In the divine Mind we form with Jesus one body, we are His brethren according to the flesh; and because of the close bond uniting us to Jesus, the maternity of Mary extends to us. The Church sees in Mary a mother carrying two children in her arms: Jesus, her divine Son, and the human race redeemed by Jesus and adopted by Mary. All her concern is to reconcile one with the other and to unite them finally in the charity of our eternal country. A mother is quite different from a queen and sovereign; love is different from authority and dominion. How could we ever give way to sadness and



discouragement, when the eye of a Mother watches over us, a Mother holding the scepter of power which extends from heaven to earth, from time to eternity!

O Virgin Mother Mary, Queen of heaven and earth, Ideal of the human race, whose power, grandeur, and love far exceed our weak powers of conception, blessed be your holy name! Blessed be He whom you have given us! O Mary, with St. Anselm we cry to you: "By the name of thy beloved Son, grant us ever to keep the memory of thine own sweetest name; may it be the delicious food of our souls; may it be with us in danger; may it be with us in sorrow; may it be for us the beginning of all joy!"

SEPTEMBER 14

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*The Exaltation of the Holy Cross*



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"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (Jn. 12:32).

When the Israelites looked upon the brazen serpent which Moses by divine command had set up in the desert, they who had been bitten by serpents were cured; so also will the wounds of our souls be healed if we fix the eyes of our souls upon the cross and meditate upon Jesus crucified.

O Jesus, help me to find light and healing in meditation upon Your bitter passion and death.

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On this day the Church commemorates the veneration of the Holy Cross at Jerusalem after its recovery from the Persians. The relic preserved at the scene of the Crucifixion after

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the finding of the true Cross had been carried off by Chosroes, king of the Persians, in A.D. 614. Fourteen years later, it was recovered by the emperor Heraclius. Heraclius had determined to carry the sacred relic upon his own shoulders in solemn pomp to the Mount to which Christ had borne His cross, but he was halted by an unseen power at the gateway leading to Mount Calvary. Zachary, the patriarch of Jerusalem, who walked at his side, suggested that the emperor's imperial splendor of gold and jewels was hardly in keeping with the humble and abject appearance of Christ when He bore His cross through the streets of Jerusalem. Thereupon the emperor laid aside his rich garments and found that when he was simply clad and barefoot he was again able to advance with the procession. Reverently the Cross was placed where it had stood before. It was still in the rich case in which it had been carried away. The patriarch and clergy, finding the seals intact, opened the case, venerated the sacred relic it contained, and then offered it to the veneration of the people. This ceremony was performed with the greatest reverence and most fervent thanksgiving, and the occasion was divinely honored by the miraculous cure of several sick persons.

Gratitude and faith full of reverence should be our sentiments as well on this great feast. But can we look upon the crucifix or make the sign of the cross without being also filled with shame at seeing in ourselves so little of the spirit of Christ crucified and so much of the spirit of the world? Let us earnestly implore our loving Savior to remove whatever in us opposes His reign, and to instill His spirit fully into our hearts. The words of Pope St. Leo in his homily for this feast may well guide our prayer: "May our understanding which the Spirit of truth enlightens, accept

with a clean and cheerful heart the glory of the Cross which shines over heaven and earth; and with spiritual insight may it see what it was that the Lord, speaking of the approach of His passion, said, *'Now is the judgment of the world, now will the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.'* O wondrous power of the Cross, O unspeakable glory of the Passion, in which there is at once the Lord's tribunal, the judgment of the world, and the power of the Crucified!"

The first exaltation of the Holy Cross occurred on the first Good Friday on Golgotha, the second exaltation took place on the occasion commemorated in today's feast; of the third exaltation we shall all be witnesses. It will take place at the end of time. One of the signs which will immediately precede the Last Judgment will be the apparition of the *sign of the Son of man* in the heavens, by which portent is surely meant the Holy Cross. Then, however, it will no longer represent combat and struggle. It will be the victorious standard of the King, announcing His imminent coming; yet it will still be the sign of contradiction and division, for it will then herald the final separation of the good and the wicked, the ultimate division between heaven and hell.

Your cross, O Jesus, is my glory; it is my happiness in spite of its weight. I hope with its aid to be victorious. For Your cross, O Jesus, I sigh, certain that if I die upon it I shall be with You. May Your spirit of humility, meekness, and pure love triumph in me; for then I shall begin to taste the most sweet manna that lies hidden in the cross; then shall I understand its glory and happiness and its unspeakable treasures.

*The Sorrows of Our Lady*



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“Let us stand beside the cross with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whose soul the sword of sorrow hath pierced” (invitatory of Matins for the feast of the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

We venerate Mary under the title of Our Lady of Seven Dolours because, although suffering permeated her whole life, it became more acute under certain circumstances, which the Church recommends to our particular meditation; then, too, the number seven may be understood in its biblical sense as an indefinite number, defying count.

Most sorrowful Mother Mary, as I have added to your grief by my sins, let me from now on console you by my efforts to become like your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Twice in the year the Church weeps for the sorrows of our Lady. The feast of her seven dolours in Passiontide dwells on the part she took in the sacrifice of Jesus; this present, second commemoration emphasizes her compassion for the Church. The liturgy of today's feast reminds us especially of the close union which existed between our Lord and our Lady in the work of our redemption and the eminent place held by the Mother of Jesus in the economy of salvation. Mary, standing at the foot of the Cross, whereon her Son gave Himself for the world, was a willing co-operator in His sacrifice. There she echoed and in a manner completed the *Fiat* of the Incarnation by the *Fiat* of the Redemption. On Golgotha also our Lady again became a mother by her

free consent, the Mother of the regenerated children of Adam.

Yet, she who had suffered no pain in giving birth to her divine Son in Bethlehem, brought us forth in anguish, in the sevenfold birth pang of her dolors. Sinless though she was, this Queen of Martyrs and Mother of Sorrows, she did not escape where we were concerned the decree pronounced upon all mothers, to whom in the person of Eve God said, "*In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.*" "Was not that word itself, 'Woman, behold thy son,'" asks St. Bernard of Mary, "a sword truly piercing thy soul and reaching even unto the separation of thy soul and spirit? What an exchange! John is given thee in place of Jesus, the servant for the Lord, the disciple for the Master, the son of Zebedee for the Son of God."

But from the time of the Annunciation when, as St. Bernardine of Siëna says, "she bore all men in her womb as a true mother bears her children," until she gave us birth on Calvary in supreme anguish of spirit, Mary was never without sorrow, because she never for an instant forgot that the life of her Son would end in crucifixion. In thinking of the profound serenity and joy that Mary never lost because of her intimate union with the divine will, and of the ecstasy she must have experienced as the Mother of God, we must not forget the agony of suffering that filled her whole life. Above all, the Church would have us draw from our meditation upon the dolors of our Lady a lively hatred of sin, which was the cause of her suffering. Her sorrow is our work. Mary suffers from us as well as for us, since it was our sins that killed Jesus. Really to compassionate our Mother is beyond our power, for how are we to form a true conception of the seven-bladed sword of grief that pierced her heart? For this we should have to be able to comprehend

the greatness of Mary's love for her divine Son and also her deep maternal love for mankind. But we can lessen her sufferings by ceasing to cause them, and we can make up for the past by our efforts now to become like her Son, our Brother, Jesus.

"Ah, Mother, font of love, make us feel the power of sorrow, that we may weep with you and obtain the fruit of the Lord's Passion" (response from the third Nocturn for the feast).

SEPTEMBER 29

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*Dedication to St. Michael the Archangel*



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"And there was a battle in heaven; Michael and his angels battled with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels" (Apoc. 12:7).

St. John the Evangelist thus described a great battle of St. Michael and the good angels with the devil. This battle may refer to the great conflict at the end of time which will reflect the battle in heaven at the beginning of time or, as the context implies, St. John's words may allude to some effort of the demons when they were vanquished by Christ in the mystery of our redemption.

St. Michael, first champion of the kingship of Christ, defend us against all our enemies, visible and invisible.

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The archangel Michael, whose name recalls his victorious war cry, "*Who is like to God!*" is mentioned directly in three passages of Holy Scripture in addition to the text quoted above. When the prophet Daniel asks God to permit the Jews

to return to Jerusalem, the archangel Gabriel assures him that his prayer has been heard, and he speaks of St. Michael as his principal helper in bringing about this deliverance of the Jews from Persia. Farther on in the Book of Daniel, the archangel, speaking of the end of the world and of the anti-christ, says, "*But at that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people.*" In the New Testament St. Jude writes, alluding to an ancient Jewish tradition of a dispute between Michael and Satan over the body of Moses: *Yet when Michael the archangel was fiercely disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, he did not venture to bring against him an accusation of blasphemy, but said, "May the Lord rebuke thee."*

According to the Fathers, there is also question of Michael in Scripture where he is not mentioned by name. They say that he was the cherub who stood at the gate of paradise to *keep the way of the tree of life*; also, that he was the angel through whom God proclaimed the Ten Commandments to His chosen people; that it was Michael who *stood in the way against Balaam*, the Hebrew prophet, when the King of the Moabites had sent for him to curse Israel; finally, that Michael was the angel who routed the army of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib.

If we honor the angels because their nature is superior to ours and because of their intimate relations with God, how deep should be our veneration of St. Michael, whom the Roman liturgy honors as prince of the heavenly host and also as the "incense-bearer" who stands beside the altar to bear the prayers of the Church to the Throne of God. But this great archangel not only attends to the general interests of Christ's kingdom on earth; he also listens to the prayers of individual members of the Church. Hence it is that after

confessing our sins to almighty God and to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin in the *Confiteor*, we acknowledge them likewise to blessed Michael the archangel. He will assist us at our deathbed, for one of his offices is to receive the souls of the elect upon their quitting the flesh. With the other angels Michael will separate the good from the wicked at the general judgment. The Middle Ages was fond of representing him in this dread function, standing at the judgment seat of Christ and holding the scales in which he weighs the souls of men and their works. In the struggle which is ever going on within us, between the spirit of God and the evil spirit, between the spirit of submission and the spirit of revolt, let us ask St. Michael to fight for us and to be our strong defense against the snares of the devil. We should especially invoke his intercession for the overthrow of the enemies of the Church and for the welfare of our Sovereign Pontiff.

O glorious St. Michael, guardian and defender of the Church of Jesus Christ, come to the assistance of the Church, against which the powers of hell are unchained. Guard with special care her august Head, and obtain for him and for us that the hour of triumph may speedily arrive. O glorious archangel, watch over us during life, defend us against the assaults of the demon, assist us especially at the hour of death, obtain for us a favorable judgment, and the happiness of beholding God face to face for endless ages.



*The Guardian Angels*



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“For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways” (Ps. 90:11).

These words of the Psalmist, referring to the people of the Old Dispensation, the Church applies to us who live under the New Law.

Holy Guardian Angel, obtain for me the grace of purity and union with God.

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Catholic theology teaches that the protection of a guardian angel is extended by our Creator to every child of Adam with no distinction of just and sinners, infidels and baptized. At birth we are, each and all, entrusted to the care of a heavenly spirit. It is true to say, therefore, that we do not know what it is to be without an angel. This fact, that we are constantly under the mighty protection of guardian spirits, has, it is certain, a profound effect upon our lives. Were it not for the watchful care of the angels, our existence here below would be inconceivably more dismal and perilous. It is the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that not only are the most perverted of men kept from greater evils by their angel guardians, but also that these heavenly spirits prevent the evil committed by the wicked from working unrestrained havoc among men. Our angels also save us from the consequences of our own evil deeds, insofar as the higher dictates of divine justice permit. Furthermore, our angels ward off from us the attacks of evil spirits, and this they do to a great extent without our being aware of it; for, since we are beings

of a lower order, their custody can be exercised without either our knowledge or participation. Their mission in our regard has also another aspect, in that they are to lead us to our supernatural destiny, the kingdom of heaven. They recognize in us their fellow participants in the graces of the Holy Spirit and also their destined companions through the happy ages of eternity. What joys we shall then share with our guardian angel, and how great will be our thankfulness when we know at last the full extent of his faithful care!

Even while we are still on this earth we can and should honor and thank our guardian angel. Each day when we recite the prayer addressed to him we should add an aspiration of gratitude. Nor let us ever forget that our angels are always with us and deserve due reverence. "In every place show respect to thy angel," St. Bernard counsels us. "Love this, thy future co-heir, the guardian appointed for thee by the Father in thy childhood." The indwelling of the Holy Trinity and the constant presence of our angel guardian — what a check the awareness of these truths should be to our unruly passions, and what a never-failing source of joy! We can also honor these wise and powerful spirits, who are loving and faithful friends as well, by confiding in them and asking their help. Moreover, in accordance with our Savior's warning, we should be careful not to scandalize our neighbor and so undo the work of his angel guardian, lest this zealous Defender demand an accounting from us before God of the soul confided to him. Finally, an excellent practice for keeping ourselves in the presence of God is that of greeting the guardian angel of those whom we meet.

O pure and happy spirit, whom Almighty God has appointed to be my guardian and defender, I thank you for your charity and zeal in my behalf. O angels of all who are destined

to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, obtain for us the true spirit of the religious state. Angels of the clergy, purify their words, actions, and intentions in that fire of love with which you ever contemplate the Face of God. Angels of all who are outside the Church, guide them to the light of truth. O angel guardians of all sinners, pray with us for the grace of their conversion. Angels of all who are now in their last agony, be their strength and consolation. Guardians of all who are on earth, protect us; unite our adoration of the Most Holy Trinity with yours. You and we have the same Fatherland; let not the distractions of earth prevent us from beginning now the heavenly life we shall one day lead with you.

OCTOBER 4

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*St. Francis of Assisi*

A.D. 1182-1226



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“Do not keep gold, or silver, or money in your girdles, no wallet for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff” (Mt. 10:9-10).

These words from the Gospel so impressed St. Francis that he resolved to apply them to himself literally. Thus commenced the marvel of this life which was so closely conformed to that of our Savior as to inspire a great and widespread renewal of Christian fervor.

O glorious St. Francis, teach me your lovable and heroic simplicity.

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No rich man ever possessed the earth as truly as this poor man of Assisi who sought God alone and depended entirely upon His providence. Francis drew all things to himself

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because all things drew him to God. This seraphic soul, marked with the stigmata of the passion, father of a religious family which has grown and flourished marvelously in the Church, is one of the chief glories of the great thirteenth century. His special merit is that he lived the Gospel according to the letter. From this Gospel of poverty, forgiveness, charity, abandonment to divine Providence, we, perhaps, take only what we find suitable to our circumstances and our tastes. We do not really live the Gospel; therefore, the ideal of holiness which God Incarnate brought to the world is seldom realized. If we could earnestly study this ideal and truly conform our lives to it, then, like St. Francis, we should taste of the joys of heaven, even amid the sorrows of earth. We should then experience the *full joy* of which our Savior speaks, and which gladdens only the life that is not divided between self-love and divine love. May St. Francis teach us to understand what the imitation of Jesus Christ really means!

How can we love Jesus and imitate Him without giving up all that prevents us from rising to Him? We complain of being unable to meditate and pray without distraction; but were our souls as disengaged from creatures as that of St. Francis of Assisi, we should be, like him, radiant with spiritual joy and the overflowing love of God. Our works, too, would then succeed as did those of St. Francis, whose labors for the conversion of souls were among the most fruitful the Church has ever seen, although, through humility, he never advanced beyond the diaconate. The humility of St. Francis of Assisi was not emotional self-depreciation; it was grounded upon the truth that what each one is in the eyes of God, that he is and no more. His great love for Christ was especially directed to His passion, and it would

seem that the grace of the stigmata which St. Francis received on or about the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in 1224 was, at least partly, a recompense for his devotion to Jesus crucified. "Nothing gives me so much consolation," he once said, when asked during an illness if he wished someone to read to him, "as to think of the life and passion of our Lord. Were I to live to the end of the world I should stand in need of no other book." He died listening to the reading of the Passion from the Gospel of St. John.

In honor of St. Francis, and to obtain the grace of living on this earth in such a way that for us as for him all creatures may form, as it were, a luminous ladder raising us to heaven, let us recite the beautiful canticle which St. Francis composed and which he loved best:

Praised be God, my Lord, for all creatures, and especially for our brother the sun, which gives us light, and is an image of Thee, my God!

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon; and for all the stars which He has created bright and beautiful in the heavens!

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind; and for the air, and the clouds, and the fine weather, and all the seasons;

for our sister the water, which is very useful, humble, precious, and pure;

for our brother the fire, which is bright and strong;

for our mother the earth, which bears us, and produces the fruits and the flowers.

Be Thou praised, O my God, for those who pardon and who suffer for love of Thee!

Be Thou praised for our sister the death of the body, which no living man can escape; unhappy is he who dies in mortal sin; but happy is he whom death finds conformed to Thy holy will!

Praise and bless my Lord, give Him thanks, and serve Him in great humility.

*The Holy Rosary of Our Lady*



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“With all your soul draw close to her; with all your strength keep her ways. . . . Thus will you afterward find rest in her, and she will become your joy. Her fetters will be your throne of majesty; her bonds, your purple cord (Ecclus. 6:27-30).

The rosary is an act of faith. As the Creed with which we begin the recitation of the rosary is itself the development of the sign of the cross, so the rosary is the flowering of the Creed in a triple crown of roses: white for the joyful mysteries, red for the sorrowful, and golden for the glorious.

O Queen of the Holy Rosary, teach me to say the rosary worthily and fruitfully.

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The prayers which compose the rosary are the most ancient, the most worthy of veneration, the most beautiful of prayers, for the “Our Father,” the “Hail Mary,” the Doxology, and the Creed were first uttered severally by our Savior, the angels, and the saints. Furthermore, it is always in company with His holy Mother that our Savior presents Himself to us in the mysteries of the rosary and, thus united with Mary, Jesus seems closer to us, more clearly revealed as the Son of Man who took upon Himself our human nature. We have the immense advantage of contemplating Him through the eyes and with the heart, so to speak, of her who, better than anyone else, penetrated these mysteries, who was their privileged witness. When we wish to contemplate the glory of the sun, we do not look directly at it. Our eyes could not endure so much brightness; instead, we look at the play of the sun’s

light on flowers and clouds. Mary is the mirror of the Sun of Justice. In her His brightness is softened and made endurable to our weak vision.

The rosary is a most efficacious prayer. First of all, it is a prayer and therefore has a claim upon the promises God has attached to prayer; second, in the rosary are united both mental and vocal prayer. It is based entirely upon the mysteries of faith, and demanding as it does a certain length of time for recitation, it assures perseverance in prayer. Moreover, it is an act of devotion which cannot fail to touch Mary's maternal heart, for we surround her with the linked prayers of the rosary like coaxing children. In the rosary we also praise Mary by incessantly hailing her as "full of grace" and "Mother of God"; we show our gratitude to God for the privileges He has given Mary, and we show our gratitude to Mary for having given us Jesus with so much love. We offer reparation by making, as it were, a spiritual pilgrimage to the places where Jesus and Mary labored and suffered for us.

But how are we to say the rosary in order to draw from it its fruits? First, we should recollect ourselves before beginning, for if we attempt to leap from the world's concerns to those of God, we are liable to carry our distractions with us. Another little pause should be made again at the beginning of each decade or even in the course of a decade, in order to avoid haste and mechanical recitation. The care we give to this matter will be pleasing to Mary and will win us her favor. We should also dwell in thought on the mysteries, preceding each decade by a short meditation and then reciting the "Hail Mary's" as praise or thanksgiving or petition with relation to the mystery concerned. Or, while reciting the vocal prayers, we may represent our Lord and our Lady

in the different mysteries and contemplate the virtues they practiced. Again, our meditation may be attached to some word or phrase of the vocal prayers we are saying: "Hail . . . full of grace . . . the Lord is with thee . . . Mother." Recited by any one of these methods the rosary becomes, not a mechanical repetition of formulas, but a masterpiece of prayer, the very work of the Holy Spirit.

"O Virgin Mary, grant that the recitation of your rosary may be for me each day in the midst of my manifold duties a bond of unity in my actions, a tribute of filial piety, a sweet refreshment, an encouragement to walk joyfully along the path of duty. Grant, above all, O Virgin Mary, that the study of your fifteen mysteries may form in my soul, little by little, a luminous atmosphere, pure, strengthening, fragrant, which will penetrate my understanding, my will, my heart, my memory, my imagination, my whole being . . ." (from a prayer of St. Pius X).

OCTOBER 11

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### *The Motherhood of Our Lady*



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"Let us celebrate the Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us adore Christ the Lord her Son" (invitatory of Matins for the feast of the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin).

The Church honors the divine Maternity also during Advent, at Christmas, and on the feast of the Annunciation; but, because other great mysteries are associated with these occasions, the particular aspect of Mary's Motherhood is likely to be less noticed. Consequently, the Church has instituted a special



feast in October honoring this mystery, that it may be given its due place in our devotion.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, help me to enter more deeply into the mystery of your Motherhood, both of the Word made flesh and of His Mystical Body.

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The divine Maternity confers upon Mary an incomparable dignity. The relationship it established between her and God is so elevated and sublime that it can be compared only with that to which the sacred humanity of Jesus was raised by His union with the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. His human nature is so fully possessed by the Son of God that in one and the same act we adore It and the Word Himself. On her side, Mary, in becoming the Mother of the Incarnate Word, contracted a real "affinity" with the Word and with the whole Trinity, so that her dignity, while it is not simply infinite like her Son's, is, however, to use the expression of St. Thomas Aquinas, "in a manner" infinite. If we honor the crib, the holy cross, and all the relics that have been hallowed by contact with the Sacred Humanity, what reverence we owe to Mary who was wholly sanctified by so close a union with Jesus that it was, as it were, identity.

Moreover, it was in Jesus and by Jesus that Mary became our Mother, and not in a figurative sense, but in a literal and real sense. "In the womb of His most pure Mother," wrote St. Pius X, "Jesus not only took mortal flesh, He also took a spiritual body formed of all those who would believe in Him. So that it can be said that Mary, bearing the Savior in her womb, bore also those whose life was included in His; therefore, all of us, inasmuch as we are incorporated into Christ, are reborn of Mary's womb, like the body united to

the head." "My sweet Son, Jesus," said our Lady to St. Gertrude, "is not *unigenitus* (an only Son), but rather, *primogenitus* (my first-born Son), because I conceived Him first in my womb; but after Him, or rather, through Him, I conceived you all by adopting you into the inmost core of my mother-heart, so that you might be at once my children and His brothers."

Through Mary is formed each mystical member of Jesus and in her all are united again to the Head. She brought us forth to the supernatural life and she cares for us during our childhood in the life of grace. This dependence upon Mary lasts all our lives, and so as long as we are on this earth we need our Mother. Let us implore her to carry us in the warmth of her love all our life long. Blessed Angela Foligno once saw her, the Queen of grace and mercy, bending over her sons and daughters in blessing and drawing them to herself. "She was entirely luminous," Blessed Angela tells us, "and seemed to gather them into herself in endless light. Do not imagine that I saw her arms of flesh; she was wholly light, admirable light. The Blessed Virgin pressed her children to her heart, and by virtue of the love that flowed from her inmost being, absorbed them into herself."

"Hail Mary, Mother of God, it is thou who hast placed in this world its Creator and Redeemer, our Guide to the kingdom of heaven.

"Hail Mary, Mother of God, it is by thee that every faithful heart is saved.

"We salute thee, O Treasure worthy of veneration, that belongeth to all mankind. Crown of virginity! Sceptre of orthodoxy!

"Temple that can never be destroyed! Place of Him who is not held by place!

"We salute thee, Mary, Mother of God" (from the *Encomium*

*ad Deiparam*, delivered by St. Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431).

OCTOBER 13

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## *Our Lady of Fatima*



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“Pray, pray a great deal and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to hell for not having someone to pray and make sacrifices for them” (words of our Lady to the children of Fatima).

On May 13, 1917, in Fatima, Portugal, three cousins, Lucia dos Santos, aged ten, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, aged nearly nine and seven respectively, were tending their parents' sheep in a valley known locally as the Cova da Iria. Soon after the noon Angelus, as they were at play, they were frightened by a brilliant flash, as of lightning. A second blinding flash alarmed them still more, but their flight homeward was checked by an extraordinary sight. Standing over the foliage of a little evergreen oak a few feet away from them was the dazzling figure of a young girl, “dressed all in white,” records Lucia, “more brilliant than the sun.”

Our Lady of Fatima, obtain for me a more ardent zeal for souls.

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At Fatima, as at Lourdes, the Mother of God appeared as a young maiden to young clients; and, although she spoke to poor and illiterate village children, she *asked* with heavenly courtesy for their co-operation as if for a favor: “I came to ask you to come here for six consecutive months on the thirteenth day at this same hour.” In the series of apparitions

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which followed, our Lady made certain requests which were directed not only to these children but to us all. They are as follows:

*Second Apparition:* "Say the rosary, inserting between the mysteries the following ejaculations: 'O my Jesus, forgive us. Save us from the fire of hell. Bring all souls to heaven, especially those in most need. . . . Jesus wants to use you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish the devotion to my Immaculate Heart in the world. I promise salvation to those who embrace it, and their souls will be loved by God as flowers placed by myself to adorn His throne.'"

*Third Apparition:* "Continue to say the rosary every day in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary to obtain peace for the world . . . for she alone can save it. . . . Sacrifice yourselves for sinners; and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice, 'My Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.'"

*Fourth Apparition:* "Pray, pray a great deal and make sacrifices for sinners, for so many souls go to hell for not having someone to pray and make sacrifices for them."

*Fifth Apparition:* "Let the people continue to say the rosary every day to obtain the end of the war."

*Sixth Apparition:* "I want to tell you that they must build a chapel here in my honor; that I am the Lady of the Rosary; that they should continue to say the rosary every day. . . . Offend not our Lord any more, for He is already much offended."

Repeatedly our Lady asked for the recitation of the rosary and for amendment of life. It would seem that her mission at Fatima was to reawaken the world to a sense of sin and to the realization that, ultimately, it is sin which lies behind wars and persecutions. If we are to be her worthy children,

our obligation is clear. "Penance, penance, penance," said Bernadette on our Lady's behalf at Lourdes. At La Salette Mary appeared bathed in tears, weeping over our sins. At Fatima she pleaded for prayer and sacrifice in atonement for sin. Her solicitude for her children is constant and universal, because she sees upon us all the precious blood of her Son. In union with our Lady, let us offer to the divine Majesty the prayer taught by the guardian angel of Fatima to the three children of Fatima:

"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly, and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference by which He Himself is offended. And by the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of you the conversion of poor sinners."

OCTOBER 15

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*St. Teresa of Ávila*

A.D. 1515-1582



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"I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).  
"Teresa and three ducats are nothing," this saint once said, "but God, Teresa, and three ducats — there you have everything."  
O great St. Teresa, obtain for me confidence in God as strong as yours, and graces of contemplative prayer.

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At the age of seven years, Teresa and her little brother Rodrigo, impressed by their reading of the lives of the saints,

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ran away from home to seek martyrdom among the Moors. As they went they prayed that God would so fill them with His love that they might gladly lay down their lives for Him. Such was the early ardor that later merited for Teresa the vision of a seraph piercing her heart with a golden arrow tipped with fire. After her death, the heart of Teresa was found to bear a long and deep mark, as of a scar. The seraphic dart, she tells us, left her wholly on fire with the love of God; yet her desire to die that she might be completely united to God was tempered by her desire to suffer for His love. She writes: "It seems to me that there is no reason I should live except only to suffer, and accordingly, this is the thing which I beg with most affection from God. Sometimes I say to Him with my whole heart, 'Lord, either to die or to suffer! I beg no other thing for myself.'" She responded further to the intense divine love which filled her soul by making the humanly rash vow of always doing that which seemed to her most perfect and best pleasing to God. Such a promise is justified only by its fulfillment, and this Teresa achieved. Divine Providence had reserved for her another kind of martyrdom than death at the hands of infidels.

After her mother's death, which occurred when Teresa was fourteen years of age, she was sent by her father to the Augustinian nuns at Ávila for her education, but illness obliged her to return home after a year and a half. There followed several years at home with her father and occasionally other relatives, notably an uncle, who acquainted Teresa with the letters of St. Jerome. The realism and fire of these letters appealed to Teresa's Castilian spirit, and aroused in her the desire of embracing the religious life. Unable to obtain her father's consent, she left home secretly to enter the Carmelite

convent of the Incarnation at Ávila. During a serious and prolonged illness which followed her profession, she began the practice of mental prayer, but later discontinued it out of what she told herself was humility. She feared that her conversations with certain worldly-minded relatives, who were frequent visitors at the convent made her unworthy of the graces which were being accorded her in prayer. The admonition of her Dominican confessor and the reading of the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* by Father Francis de Osuna, a book given her by the same prudent and pious uncle who had been instrumental in fostering her vocation, brought her back after years of laxity to the serious and systematic practice of mental prayer. From that time on, prayer was the very soul, the very life of Teresa. Her whole subsequent history, as related by herself, is, so to speak, an exposition of the different degrees of mental prayer to which she was successively raised. Through her own interior renewal Teresa was able to foster this renewal in others, and so oppose to the evils of her day a counterweight of holiness which in the course of the following centuries was to prove of immense service to the Church. The Church in turn has accorded St. Teresa of Ávila, alone among women saints, the honor of eulogizing her doctrine in the liturgy. The Collect of the Mass for her feast reads as follows:

“Graciously hear us, O God, our Savior, that as we rejoice in the festival of Thy holy virgin Teresa, so we may be fed with the food of her heavenly teaching and grow in loving devotion toward Thee.”

*Jesus Christ the King*



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“He has written on his vesture and on his thigh: King of kings, and Lord of lords. To him be glory and empire for ever and ever” (antiphon of second Vespers for the feast of Christ the King).

“We do not want this man to rule over us,” cries the unbelieving world today, like the Jews of old before Pilate’s tribunal. In order to lead the entire human race back to Christ enthroned as divine Victor and Sovereign at the right hand of the Father, Pius XI, in 1925, instituted the feast of Christ the King and decreed its observance throughout the whole Church.

Divine Redeemer, our Lord and King, help us to put away from our hearts all enmities and sinful inclinations that would destroy Your sovereign reign in us and among us.

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The whole Christian tradition views our Lord Jesus Christ as a victorious king. In the early Christian centuries and through the Middle Ages our Savior was always depicted as triumphant, even upon the cross, where He wore, not a crown of thorns, but a royal diadem. Only after the Crusades did Christians begin to portray their crucified Redeemer from a more human, subjective point of view, with His head bowed and weighed down by the crown of thorns. The Church has always clung fast in her liturgical texts to the ancient concept of Christ triumphant on the cross. Even though she has yielded to the human concept of Jesus Crucified to the extent of permitting Him to be shown thus



upon her altars, she sees in the Cross not the wood of disgrace and humiliations, but the glorious sign of our redemption. In Christ the Man of sorrows, she honors the divine Redeemer, the King of eternal glory.

Christ is a victorious King, because He gave battle to a personal enemy unleashed against Him and overthrew him. Divine Omnipotence could in an instant have dethroned the Power of darkness, just as Omnipotence could have saved the elect even in a world of unconquered evil. But this would not have been victory in a real sense. For true victory, the hostile forces must be in some way equalized according to created standards. Therefore, "this conflict, undertaken for our sakes," as Pope St. Leo says, "was fought with great and wonderful fairness of equality, inasmuch as the Almighty Lord does battle with that most cruel enemy, not in His own Majesty, but in our lowliness, opposing him by the very same form and the same nature which shared indeed our mortality, but which was free from every kind of sin."

The victory of Christ is a supernatural reality which must deeply affect the thinking of all Christians. We know that Christ is in the glory of the Father. This glorification must be thought of as consisting essentially in the happiness of Jesus Himself. On earth much of the happiness due Him in virtue of the hypostatic union was withheld from His humanity. Now there can be no possible check or limitation to the divine gladness that inundates Him in soul and body. In Christ's glory is included the glorification of all the elect. We are victorious in His victory. He gives us all the means necessary for our own achievements, great and small. Moreover, there is no event, no kind of happening on this earth which does not appear insignificant beside this supreme reality, the victory of the King of glory. The Christian

temperament, therefore, is one of supernatural optimism. This was the temperament of the Apostles and the Fathers, and it characterizes also the society of the elect as they behold the glory of Christ in noontide splendor, as they see Christ throughout the aeons exercising His power with irresistible might from one end of the universe to the other. O Jesus, Sovereign King of the universe, be King of my intellect, for You are infinite Wisdom and Truth. Be King of my will, for You are infinite Holiness. Be King of my heart, for You are infinite Goodness and Love. Make all my powers of body and soul serve only to promote Your glory and the sanctification of my soul.

NOVEMBER 1

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*All Saints*



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“After this I saw a great multitude which no man could number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands” (Apoc. 7:9).

Today the Church shows us the host of the blessed in heaven, glorifying God and being in turn glorified by Him.

“All ye holy men and women, saints of God, make intercession for us.”

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The full assembly of the saints might be compared to an immense and splendid rainbow, wherein is reflected the beauty and majesty of the Savior. Each blessed soul, taken alone, represents but one single ray of the Daystar, the Sun of Justice, and each one is different from every other; each

is unique. In opening this glorious scene before us today, the Church intends especially to recall to our minds the essential truth that heaven is our real fatherland. We were created not for time but for eternity, and every day, every moment, we are preparing the kind of eternity which is to be ours.

The Church has canonized certain of her children who have given incontestable proof of their salvation; but there are others also who enjoy the eternal rewards of sanctity. What a multitude of uncanonized saints there must be in the courts of heaven! All states of life and all ages are represented there. No one can excuse himself from striving for sanctity on the pretext that his circumstances are unfavorable. Their environment was certainly not favorable to the martyrs; the penitents received their crowns because they reacted against their surroundings; and the souls who have remained innocent have done so at the cost of heroic struggle. The way that leads to sanctity is, quite simply, the full supernatural living of one's state in life. Sanctity, therefore, does not consist merely in the possession of sanctifying grace and in ordinary virtue. The practice of Christian virtue must be carried to a heroic degree with the love of God alone in view and with full renouncement of human considerations. With the assistance of divine grace this glorious achievement is possible for each one of us in the conditions which obtain for us here and now. The duties assigned by obedience can lead us to perfection, if we sanctify them by accomplishing them perfectly and for God alone. The martyrdom which we all can achieve is in the daily carrying of our cross purely for the love of Jesus. Every soul is not bound to attain the same degree of sanctity, but each of us must strive to reach the height that God intends for us individually.

As members of the Church Militant we shall today join the Church Triumphant in praising our most merciful God for the grace and glory He has bestowed upon His saints. Nothing can incite us more powerfully to aspire with our whole strength to their happiness and to eternal companionship with them than meditation upon the glory which they now enjoy and which they eagerly wait for us to share. Let us keep before our minds today the splendors of the heavenly Jerusalem: God in His majesty, our Savior, whose humanity united to His divinity fills all heaven with radiance and joy; Mary Immaculate, shining in glory, raised above the angels and saints to a throne beside her divine Son; all the choirs of heavenly spirits, brilliant with holiness; the venerable assemblage of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; the triumphant army of the martyrs; the august senate of the doctors, and the joyous choir of virgins consecrated to the stainless Lamb. What joy on their countenances, what ecstasy in their hearts!

“Grant us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, the pardon of our sins; and through the intercession of Thy saints, whose solemnity we celebrate today, bestow upon us so great a devotion that we may deserve to be admitted into their company. May their merits assist us, who are hindered by our own crimes; may their intercession excuse us, who are accused by our own misdeeds; and as Thou hast bestowed on them the palm of heavenly glory, refuse not to us the pardon of our sins . . .”  
(prayer from an ancient liturgy).

*St. Charles Borromeo*

A.D. 1538–1584



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“And I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do according to my heart and my soul” (1 Kings 2:35).

St. Charles was a leading figure in the Catholic Counter Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was largely owing to his wisdom that the Council of Trent was successfully concluded.

St. Charles Borromeo, teach me to unite the active with the contemplative life as you did.

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When Charles was born at the castle of Arona on Lake Maggiore, the family escutcheon bore the word *humilitas* crowned with gold. It was said of the Borromeos that they knew nothing of humility except the word, and honored it only by its inscription on the family crest; but now this armorial device was to be justified in the most illustrious scion of that noble house. A Borromeo was to learn to empty his heart of self that God might fill it.

At the early age of twenty-two Charles was called by Pius IV, his maternal uncle, to the post of Secretary of State. Shortly after, he was created a cardinal and archbishop of Milan. Subsequent events proved that these appointments had been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Charles began the much needed reform of his diocese with himself and his household. The numerous officials and servants whom he had been obliged to maintain in Rome were dismissed and replaced by ecclesiastics and a few secular servants. He re-

nounced the benefices with which his uncle, the Supreme Pontiff, had desired to enrich him. During a plague in Milan he stripped himself of his personal fortune and sold his furniture, even his bed, for the relief of the poor. Nor was he more attached to honors than to wealth. St. Charles in the full tide of prosperity became more and more detached from it through taking, as it were, a near view of its emptiness, just as others often turn to God by experiencing temporal adversity. The glory of God and the welfare of the Church completely absorbed his thoughts; but the weight of business and the great fatigues of his pastoral duties and visits never caused St. Charles to omit his frequent fasts or mental prayer, which he sometimes prolonged to six consecutive hours. A definite order of the day was also appointed in his episcopal residence for sleep, meals, and exercises of piety. The result of the care he took of his household was seen in the lives of its members, many of whom became distinguished bishops and prelates.

After putting his own house in order, St. Charles reformed his flock, the city, the religious communities in his diocese, and finally the entire diocese. His principal maxim was "Treat of the interests of Jesus Christ in the spirit of Jesus Christ"; and his program, the enforcement of the disciplinary decrees of the Council of Trent. An endless series of general and special mandates were dictated by his zeal, as also pastoral letters and instructions on the reform of the sacred liturgy. A record of his writings would constitute a true pastoral encyclopedia, and would appear to be the accumulated works of a long and crowded life; yet St. Charles died at the early age of forty-six. And all his writing was done in the midst of trials and contradictions which would seem to have been sufficient in themselves to claim his whole atten-

tion. Violent and unscrupulous opposition to his reforms led on one occasion even to attempted assassination. Moreover, the eminent position of St. Charles as one of the foremost pastoral theologians who arose in the Church to offset the decay of medieval life and the excesses of the Protestant reformers appears to be due rather to spiritual than natural forcefulness. A friend once said of him, "I have often wondered how it was that without any natural eloquence or anything particularly attractive in his manner he was able to work such changes in the hearts of his hearers. He spoke little and gravely and in a voice barely audible, but his words always had effect."

"Ever keep Thy Church, O Lord, we beseech Thee, under the protection of St. Charles, Your confessor and bishop; that through the intercession of him who became glorious by his watchful care over his flock, we may ever burn with love for Thee" (Collect).

NOVEMBER 11

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### *St. Martin of Tours*

ca. A.D. 316(?)–397



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"Behold a great priest who in his days pleased God" (Gradual of the Mass for the feast of St. Martin of Tours).

St. Martin of Tours was the first saint not a martyr to be honored by the whole Church. The Gallican liturgy ranked him with the Apostles, for he was the principal evangelizer of Gaul.

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O glorious St. Martin, obtain for me faith and love like yours,  
that I too may see Jesus in my neighbor.

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The almost incredible number of churches dedicated to St. Martin of Tours in France alone bears witness to the immense popularity of this great bishop and confessor of the Western Church. He was born in Hungary of pagan parents and reared in Italy. At the age of ten years he was received into the Church as a catechumen. After several years spent in military service, which, as the son of a veteran, he was obliged to enter at fifteen, he was baptized and finally ordained by St. Hilary of Poitiers. Always a monk by attraction, he was induced to submit to his consecration as Bishop of Tours only by a stratagem. On the pretext of calling him to the city to give his blessing to a sick person, the people of Tours forcibly conveyed him to the church and made him their bishop. But St. Martin continued to observe the monastic rule of life which, in company with other hermits, his disciples, he had previously followed in the monastery given him by St. Hilary at some distance from Poitiers. He also played a very active part in the ecclesiastical life of his day, sometimes leaving his see for very distant localities to plead the interests of the Church.

The entire life of St. Martin shone with heroic virtue. His great faith and ardent love of God and his neighbor are well exemplified by the famous incident of the cloak which occurred in Amiens in Gaul. While he was still a catechumen and a soldier, St. Martin cut his military cape in half with his sword in order to clothe a poor mendicant who asked an alms in the name of Jesus Christ. The following night he saw Jesus clad with this portion of his cloak and heard Him saying to the angels, "Martin, who is only a catechumen, has



clothed me with this garment." In his last illness when he heard his monks sobbing near his death bed, eager though he was to be with Christ, he exclaimed, "Lord, if I can still be useful to Thy people, I refuse not to labor; may Thy holy will be done." But God was content with His servant's good will and shortly after his generous prayer Martin gave up his blessed soul to his Creator. He died lying by his own request upon ashes, for he said, "It becomes not a Christian to die otherwise than upon ashes. I shall have sinned if I leave you any other example."

So great were the miraculous powers granted to St. Martin during his life and after his death, that he is given the title *Thaumaturgos*, or Wonder-Worker. God seems to have lavished the gift of miracles upon him. Marvelous accounts are preserved of his power over the elements, over diseases, and even over death itself. The holiness of St. Martin was founded upon humility and self-denial, fruitful prayer, and ardent fraternal charity. If we are to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* and so be recognized by Him on the last day, these virtues must be made to grow within us also. Especially, like St. Martin, we should not limit the gift of ourselves to Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, but extend it also to His members.

"O Martin, equal to the Apostles, succour us who keep thy feast. . . . Do now what thou didst heretofore: increase the glory of the Church and frustrate the wiles of Satan. Thrice thou didst despoil the grave of its prey, raise up now those who are buried in sin. As once thou didst share thy mantle with another, clothe us with the garb of holiness. . . . Glory be to the Holy Trinity whom Martin confessed by his life; may he obtain that our faith in that mystery be confirmed by works" (from a hymn to St. Martin of Tours by St. Odo of Cluny).

*The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple*



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“Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear, forget your people and your father’s house. So shall the king desire your beauty; for he is your lord, and you must worship him” (Ps. 44:11, 12).

It is a constant tradition in the Church that at the age of three years the Blessed Virgin was presented in the Temple by St. Joachim and St. Anne to be raised there and consecrated to God’s service.

O Mary, obtain for me the grace of perseverance in my total consecration to God by my religious vows.

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How moving and beautiful it is to picture St. Joachim and St. Anne leading their little daughter Mary, the most beautiful and lovable of children, up the steps of the Temple! Surely it was a painful sacrifice for these loving parents to give up their daughter, the light and joy of their home, at the tender age of three years. Why did they make the sacrifice? Legend says that it was in fulfillment of a promise they had made before Mary’s birth to offer her to the Lord. No less moving to contemplate is the sacrifice of Mary herself. Inasmuch as she had the use of reason from her birth, and probably even before, she could now, young as she was, accomplish an act which of itself demanded full maturity of reason: the total oblation of herself to the Most High. For Mary the ceremony of her presentation meant the solemn exterior consecration of herself to God, without reserve and without thought of recompense, ratifying the complete gift she had interiorly already made of herself to Him.

Mary's life in the Temple was in all respects most perfect and holy. Her days were spent in prayer and labor in the service of the Temple and her companions and in the study of Scripture. Mary herself is said to have revealed to St. Elizabeth of Hungary the subjects of her prayers. According to this revelation, she prayed long and earnestly for an increase of grace and virtue; she asked to love and hate only that which God loves and hates; she prayed for her people, for the Temple, for the peace and prosperity of the Holy City. Finally, she asked to live in the days when the Messiah would appear and to be the handmaid of her who would be the mother of the Redeemer. Mary observed with exactness, daily and hourly, the smallest points of the Mosaic prescriptions, serving and adoring her God in the letter as well as in the spirit of the Law. With the other young maidens who were being reared and educated in the Temple she probably helped to adorn the sanctuary and took part in the ceremonies and chants of the processions; of these processions the Psalmist says, *The singers lead, the minstrels follow, in their midst the maidens play on timbrels.*

Yet Mary's real teacher was not anyone of those placed in charge of her, but the Holy Spirit Himself. He was watching over His Spouse and forming her heart with a solicitude and love such as had never been lavished on any other creature. All these graces and this progress in virtue and holiness, however, had for their purpose, in God's sight, something more than the perfection of Mary herself; they were a preparation for the Incarnation. And so, in the plan of God, who disposes all with power and wisdom, the life of Mary in the Temple served to hasten the Incarnation. With what infinite complacency, joy, and love the Holy Trinity must have contemplated and received her prayers!

O holy parents of Mary, St. Joachim and St. Anne, obtain for me your beautiful spirit of sacrifice. Dearest Mother Mary, deign to give me your dispositions of purity, fidelity, and industry, and help me to serve God with the ardor and piety you showed as a child so young in years, yet even lowlier in humility. Present me to Jesus, O Mary, in union with your most perfect and holy offering of yourself to God at your presentation in the Temple.

DECEMBER 8

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### *The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady*



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“Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people” (Jud. 15:10).

The first and brightest jewel in the crown of the Mother of God is the privilege of her Immaculate Conception. In saying that Mary was conceived without sin we declare our belief that by a special privilege and in anticipation of the merits of Jesus Christ, Mary was from the first instant of her existence preserved from original sin and endowed with a fulness of sanctifying grace.

Immaculate Virgin, teach me to hate all sin as you do.

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The mystery of the Immaculate Conception glorifies the Most-Holy Trinity as well as Mary herself. The omnipotence of the Father is shown not only in His power to enact laws and punish their violation, but also in His power to make exceptions; therefore, His suspension of the law of malediction in Mary's case glorifies His limitless authority. The passion and death of the Incarnate Word had no effect more

efficacious or more magnificent than the Immaculate Conception. The Son greeted His Mother at the first moment of her existence with the purest and most beautiful flower that sprang from His redemptive blood—preservation from all sin. The inexhaustible bounty of the Holy Spirit is uniquely revealed in this mystery, because Mary, alone of all the children of men, received a plenitude of grace from the first instant of her life.

As for Mary herself, the Immaculate Conception was the basis of her holiness and her perfect purity. To this privilege she owed her preservation from personal sin as well as from original sin. Furthermore, Mary began in life where the saints end; more than this, “From the very moment of Mary’s conception,” says Father Olier, “the Holy Spirit poured out on her more graces than all the most perfect and most eminent souls together ever possessed or ever will possess.” And this treasure of sanctity was ever to increase and be multiplied by new gifts of extraordinary grace. Her progress was continuous, for Mary’s advance was never halted or delayed by self-love or attachment to the things of this world. This immense, unthinkable capital of holiness, which Mary made to fructify so happily, rested upon her Immaculate Conception. This mystery was also the condition, the worthy preparation, and the accompaniment of the supereminent dignity of her who was to be the Mother of God and the Queen of heaven and earth. The other glorious privileges of Mary: the virgin birth of the Savior, the incorruptibility of her body, her assumption into heaven before the final judgment, were only conditionally necessary; but it was essential above all and from every aspect of Mary’s position that she be never for a single moment under Satan’s power. Had the choice been left to Mary herself she would have

renounced all other privileges rather than that of the Immaculate Conception.

For us this mystery was the first step toward our redemption, the dawning of the Daystar who was to bring to the world pardon and peace. It also reveals strikingly the divine abhorrence of sin. The nearer a creature approaches to God, the more free it must be from sin, the greatest of evils. Because of our imperfections we are not fully sensible of the ugliness of sin, while Mary's very purity made her all the more sensitive to pain from contact with it. We suffer from wounded self-love and from our unruly appetites, but Mary suffered from sin, because she was so pure and because she was consumed by the love of God whom sin offends, and by the love of her Son whom sin crucified, and because she loves us whom sin wounds and kills.

"O God, who, by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, made her a worthy habitation for Thy Son, and by His foreseen death preserved her from all stain of sin; grant, I beseech Thee, that through her intercession we may be cleansed from sin and come with pure hearts to Thee" (Collect of the Mass for the feast of the Immaculate Conception).

DECEMBER 10

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*Translation of the Holy House of Loreto*



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"O Lord God, thou hast lifted up my dwelling from the earth"  
(Vesper antiphon for the feast of the Translation of the Holy House of Loreto).

Since at least the fifteenth century the Holy House of Loreto, which, tradition says, was miraculously transported to Italy from Palestine, has been among the most famous shrines of our Lady.

Our Lady of Loreto, help me to venerate you worthily and mercifully obtain for me the grace I need most in my religious life.

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The great domed basilica of the city of Loreto houses the most sacred of all the shrines in Christendom dedicated to our Lady. According to tradition it was her own home and the home of the Holy Family. It is said that even in apostolic times the house of our Lady was set apart from secular use and that, when the empress Helena went to Nazareth on a pilgrimage to the holy places, she "found there the House of the Angelical Salutation," which she covered with a beautiful church to the Mother of God. We are also told that in 1253 St. Louis, King of France, heard Mass in Nazareth "in the exact chamber where the Virgin Mary was declared Mother of God." Then, on May 10, 1291, some Dalmatian shepherds found a strange building in their field which the parish priest, from information given him in a dream, identified as the Holy House. A sixteenth-century inscription at the door of the Basilica of Loreto summarizes the tradition regarding the miraculous translation of this shrine. It reads as follows:

Christian pilgrim, you have before your eyes the Holy House of Loreto, venerable through the world on account of the divine mysteries accomplished in it and the glorious miracles herein wrought. It is here that most holy Mary, Mother of God was born; here, that she was saluted by the angel; here, that the Eternal Word was made flesh. Angels

conveyed this house from Palestine to the town of Tersato in Illyria in the year of salvation, 1291, in the pontificate of Nicholas IV. Three years later in the beginning of the pontificate of Boniface VIII it was carried by the ministry of angels, and placed in a wood near this hill in the vicinity of Recanati in the March of Ancona, where, having changed its position thrice in the course of a year, at length, by the will of God, it took up its permanent position on this spot three hundred years ago. Ever since that time . . . this Holy House, whose walls do not rest on any foundation and yet remain solid and uninjured after so many centuries, has been held in reverence by all nations.

Whatever the facts in the case, for the authenticity of the tradition concerning the Holy House has long been the subject of controversy, it would seem that our Lady herself has desired that the following words of Isaias be verified in the history of this famous shrine: *My house shall be called the house of prayer for all nations. . . . The glory of Libanus shall come to thee . . . to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet.* Since December 10, 1294, when the Holy House was allegedly set down miraculously in Loreto, it has been a most celebrated place of pilgrimage. More than forty popes have in various ways honored the shrine. The feast appointed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites has been granted a special Mass and Office. Numerous cures have been performed at the Holy House, and it was here that St. Francis Xavier received the inspiration to devote himself to the apostolate in India. Let us thank our Lady and the divine Child for preserving for us in a Catholic land this sacred relic and for honoring it with so many miracles and favors. It is as if they wished to console us for the Holy Sepulcher's remaining in infidel hands; for in the Holy House of Loreto we possess a tangible link with the great



moment when the Word was made flesh and began to dwell among us.

“O God, who in Thy mercy sanctified the Blessed Virgin Mary’s house by the mystery of the Word made flesh, and miraculously placed it in the heart of Christendom, grant that we may shun the abodes of sinners and become worthy to dwell in Thy own holy house” (Collect).



















