

ANTONIO CARDINAL BACCI

MEDITATIONS



**FOR
EACH
DAY**

MEDITATIONS FOR EACH DAY

Antonio Cardinal Bacci

As the title suggests this book contains an appropriate theme of reflection for each day of the year. The author has done his best to be concise but there is an abundance of ideas for meditation.

It is an excellent book for priests and nuns who find little time to devote to spiritual reading and who, nevertheless, realise the necessity of aids to meditation.

It is a book which should be of enormous help to the lay person, themes for reflection are short, clear and fully applicable.

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by

ANTONIO CARDINAL BACCI

Translated by Desmond Williams and Brian Power

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PREFACE

“Pray for me,” the well-known spiritual writer, Father Cordovani, once wrote in a letter to a friend, “that I may not die without having led some soul to sanctity and without having written some book which will continue to preach the Gospel long after my voice has been silenced for ever.”

In writing these pages I have desired likewise to do a little good, first of all for myself and secondly for those who may wish to read and reflect upon them. I hoped to accomplish something for myself in that I wrote down these short daily meditations in order to be able to remember them more easily and to be able to turn to them whenever the opportunity should arise. Then, on the advice of enlightened friends, I decided to publish them in the hope that they might prove useful to others.

It was my intention to produce an edifying rather than an erudite work. This explains the simple style and the repetition of certain ideas. I have found it convenient to return to these ideas at regular intervals in order to impress them more deeply on the mind and heart of the reader.

There are many well-written books of meditations, but they are either too long and therefore inaccessible to many classes of people who complain that they have not got time to read them, or they are written in an antiquated style which is not acceptable today. The result is that many persons, including some who are genuinely holy, never make a meditation at all, and this is a very great loss.

I have done my best to be concise and, at the same time, to offer an abundance of ideas, in the hope that the reader of these pages may derive from them material for useful reflections and for profitable resolutions.

May God and the Blessed Virgin bless my labour so that it may be the source of good for many souls.

THE AUTHOR.

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JANUARY

1st January

THE NEW YEAR

1. This is a new gift which God in His infinite goodness gives to us. But every gift of God demands on our part a generous expression of gratitude, which should result in positive acts of virtue. Gratitude is an empty and short-lived sentiment unless it is accompanied by a sincere intention of performing good works.

Time is the price of eternity, because with time we can purchase an eternity of happiness or misery.

Consider this great truth. Every year is like a ladder in our lives. Now, it is necessary that this ladder should lead us, not perilously downwards towards evil, but upwards towards Heaven, even if with faltering footsteps.

The New Year opens today as a blank page in the diary of our lives. What do we intend to write there? The usual inanities and sins, perhaps? Let us reflect before God and in the light of the eternity which awaits us. This is the time for great decisions. It is necessary that we should offer our resolutions to God along with a humble and fervent prayer that He will strengthen us to comply faithfully with His grace.

2. During these days it is customary to exchange, verbally or in writing, good wishes for the New Year. But these poor greetings are often nothing more than conventional phrases. Men lack the power to transmute such good wishes into reality. God alone is the source of every material and spiritual good; therefore He alone can ensure that these benevolent expressions

are translated into deeds of Christian renovation. Since today is the beginning of the New Year, it is especially important for us to ask God more fervently and insistently to bless the resolutions which we are making for ourselves and the good wishes which we are showering on our friends.

These wishes have no meaning, and these resolutions have no force, if they are not accompanied by fervent and persevering prayer.

3. It is suggested in *The Imitation of Christ* that if we were to get rid of at least one habit of sin every year, we should soon be holy. If we have not tried to do this in the past, let us propose to do it in the future. This year let us select the principal defect which we possess, the sin into which we are most accustomed to fall. Let us seek to eradicate it with all the strength of our soul, assisted by the grace of God which will certainly not be denied us. Let us request for this purpose the most powerful patronage of Mary Most Holy. Let us pass this day in close union with God and under the maternal mantle of our Heavenly Mother. Finally, let us promise earnestly that all the days of the New Year will follow the same pattern.

2nd January

THE NECESSITY OF MEDITATION

1. "*With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart.*"¹

Very often the world is plunged in the desolation of evil because there is nobody who will speak with God in the silence of his heart and try to regulate his life according to His holy commandments. It is in a particularly outstanding way today that the heresies of actionism and externalism dominate the great mass of mankind. To act, to rush, to arrive . . . above all, to arrive!

But to arrive where? In this frantic, frenzied and tumultuous race, in which good people are often found competing, two very sure things are forgotten, namely, that we shall finally arrive at death, and that from death we shall pass on to eternity. The whole course of our lives, therefore, should be directed towards this end. But if we are to keep this end in view, prudent reflection is essential, especially meditation, made with the assistance of the Divine light, on the eternal truths.

Absorbed in the deafening din of the world around us, it is difficult to hear the voice of God. At least for a little while each day, we must create within ourselves a zone of silence in order to listen to His voice. Since God speaks readily in the silence of the heart, let us recollect ourselves before Him in this quiet oasis. At least a quarter of an hour of daily meditation is essential for the life of a Christian. This should be the jumping-off board for all the actions of the day, if we wish these to be correct and productive of good.

2. The masters of the spiritual life assure us that without the practice of meditation it is almost impossible for the just man to persevere in virtue, or for the tepid to become fervent, or for the sinner to be converted. God, it is true, can work miracles. At times the grace of God can strike the sinner with the suddenness of a thunderbolt and convert him. But it is the ordinary rule of the spiritual life that meditation on the truths of eternity, especially on the last things, stirs up the soul and moves it, under the influence of Divine grace, to form good resolutions. Even though the first fervour early diminishes, the daily repetition of this pious practice revives and strengthens such good resolutions, and causes them to be realised in activities which are in accordance with Christian teaching.

Sin and tepidity cannot co-exist with the practice of daily mental prayer, if this is carried out as it should be. If we keep our hearts united to God and listen willingly and attentively to His voice, we shall be able to effect in ourselves that total

renovation of which St. Paul speaks: "*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.*"²

3. There are various ways of meditating. Each one should choose whichever suits his own character and disposition. It will always be necessary for him at the outset, however, to place himself in the presence of God, asking for light and strength from Him; then to reflect on certain truths in an effort to apply them to his own particular circumstances and needs; and finally to make the necessary resolutions and beseech God to bless them and make them fruitful.

It is very useful, moreover, to recall to mind frequently during the day the resolutions which have been formed, and to accompany these reflections with short prayers, ejaculations, and acts of love for God.

¹ Jer. 12, 11.

² Eph. 4, 23.

3rd January

MAKING A GOOD MEDITATION

1. It is not enough simply to make a meditation. It ought to be made well. It is well made only when it results in an increase of solid virtue and sanctity. Meditation, moreover, should not be study, but mental prayer—a raising of the mind to God, asking Him to illumine the darkness of our hearts, too often entangled with the things of the world, and to reinforce our wills, rescuing them from the violent attractions of evil and drawing them in the direction of virtue and sacrifice. To meditate is not to study, but to pray. Whoever loses himself in subtle investigations of Christian Doctrine in order to learn something or to be able to mystify others, is studying, not meditating. It

would be even worse to let one's imagination wander off into a kind of pseudo-mystic daydream.

Let us be quite clear about this. Meditation is not a waste of time, but a very serious occupation. It consists in placing ourselves in the presence of God, in admitting to Him our misery and weakness, in thinking about the eternal truths so that our minds may be enlightened, and in aiming at a Christian self-renewal through the making and carrying out of good resolutions.

2. Some people complain that they cannot concentrate for any great length of time on meditation. In their case it is very helpful to combine mental and vocal prayer. Short ejaculations, and expressions of love for God and of an ardent desire for holiness, can restore the atmosphere of recollection, making the intellect more attentive, the heart more fervent, and the entire spiritual exercise more profitable.

When our minds wander or grow drowsy, we must pull ourselves together by placing ourselves once more in God's presence and beginning to converse with Him in a humble and loving fashion. We must remember how much we need Him and how anxious He is to inspire and help us. We are so poor and weak; He is infinitely powerful and strong. We are lost in darkness; He is the Light which illumines every man who is travelling through this world.

3. Alessandro Manzoni was once asked how he had managed to penetrate so deeply into the human mind. Newton was asked how he had succeeded in discovering the law of universal gravity. Manzoni's reply was: "*By thinking about it.*" Newton's was: "*By thinking intensely.*"

Now, in our meditations we must reveal ourselves to ourselves, which is a very difficult thing to do. It is nevertheless supremely important, because its purpose is not literary or scientific but is the eternal salvation of our souls. The attaining of such a purpose demands serious application on our part, as well as earnest prayer that God will guide us so that we may lead lives which

will be in unison with Him and directed towards their eternal goal, the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision of God. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus always held that anybody who was careful to spend at least ten minutes every day in devout meditation was certain of salvation.

4th January

SIN

1. In that we prefer our own wayward whims to the law of God, sin is an abuse of liberty. It is a revolt against right reason, the dictates of which we refuse to obey. It is an offence against our Creator and Redeemer, whose commandments we despise and whose redeeming grace we reject by our actions. It is, moreover, an act of supreme folly, for it extinguishes not only the supernatural splendour of grace, but also the natural light of reason. Through sin man is brutalised, and experiences in himself as his first punishment the confusion of his whole being.

In practice, the sinner denies God Who has created and redeemed him. He upsets the natural order of things and is violently separated from the source of all truth, beauty and goodness. As a result he experiences in himself the hell which he has constructed with his own hands—a hell of emptiness, disgust and remorse. Unless the helping hand of God reaches out to rescue him from the abyss, all this is simply a bitter foretaste of eternal despair. God, as St. Augustine has written, has ordained from all eternity that every dissolute soul will be its own punishment. For the sinner hell begins on this earth. There can be no peace for the wicked.

When we realise the gravity, stupidity and dire consequences of sin, it seems impossible that a rational being, enlightened and

enriched by divine grace, should continue to sin. Nevertheless, sad experience teaches us that the lives of individuals, families and human society in general are often distorted by this evil, which is the root of all other evils.

2. In order to understand more clearly the gravity of sin, it is helpful at this stage to consider three things:—

(a) The world with all its evils—sorrows, diseases, wars, plagues and death. All these do not come directly from the will of God, Who is the highest good, but happen with His permission. They are the effect of original sin and of the continuing transgressions of men.

(b) Hell, which is the handiwork of sin. God, infinitely good but also infinitely just, has ordained this terrible and everlasting punishment for the rebellious sinner.

(c) The Crucifix. To save us from sin the God-Man has suffered the cruellest of torments and death, but men go on offending Him with unbelievable ingratitude.

3. Now let us turn the spotlight on ourselves and think of our past lives. So many sins and abuses of God's grace! Such coldness and ingratitude! Where has all this brought us? Spiritually, sin has deprived us of God and of the supernatural life which His grace gives us. Intellectually, it is an absurdity, a dishonour and a degradation. Physically, it is an inversion of the right order and often means total ruin. Let us humbly repent, therefore, and make resolutions so firm that we shall be ready to face any sacrifice, even death, in order to put them into practice.

5th January

1. Next to mortal sin, the greatest of all evils is venial sin. Sin is always an offence against the God of goodness. When we sin, we place our own will above His and put Him in a position

secondary to ourselves. If mortal sin is spiritual suicide because it extinguishes in us the divine life of grace, venial sin is an injury, more or less grave, to the soul. The former completely separates us from God; the latter moves us farther away from Him. Mortal sin means the death of the soul. Venial sin is a disease of the soul which reduces its supernatural powers and leaves it more open to the ever-increasing attractions of evil.

We cannot speak of small sins, as if sin could be a triviality. Sin is always something great and terrible, because it is an offence against our Creator and Redeemer, whom we should love, honour and serve with every impulse of our heart and with the whole strength of our will. It is the height of ingratitude, because in order to offend God we make use of the gifts He has given us—our eyes, ears, speech and all our powers of soul and body.

Let us think seriously about this. We must firmly resolve to be more vigilant so that with the grace of God we may avoid ever committing a deliberate venial sin.

2. There is another motive also which obliges us carefully to avoid ever committing a venial sin. The path of sin leads us down a smooth and slippery incline towards destruction. Once we begin to descend it is difficult to stop. Even to begin is a disaster:

He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare.¹

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in a very little thing is unjust also in much.²

Whoever is faithful to God in little things, will receive from Him the grace to remain faithful also in greater things, but a man who despises the lesser falls rejects the divine assistance and so exposes himself to the danger of falling more seriously. If we reflect on such dangers, we shall have a real fear of venial sin and shall be always on our guard against it.

3. The Gospel tells us that we must render an account of every idle word, and that nothing tarnished can be admitted into the splendour of Paradise. In the terrible torments of

Purgatory we must pay the full price for all our faults, even the slightest. The thought of such fearful punishment should frighten us, but the love of God should keep us far from all shadow of sin. We read of some of the saints that throughout their lives they wept at the mere remembrance of their slightest negligence. If we loved God truly, we should shun the least suggestion of sin.

¹ Eccles. 19, 1.

² Luke 16, 10.

6th January

THE EPIPHANY

Let us consider the faith of the Magi, a faith which was willing, lively and active. They saw in the sky the star which heralded the Infant Jesus, and experienced the divine inspiration in their hearts. Immediately, they went in search of Him. They were not even deterred by the long and hazardous journey which lay before them.

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they found Herod, who did not know what they were talking about. The star disappeared, and the priests replied coldly to the questions they asked. But all the time their trust in the divine call continued to grow. Eventually they reached a poor barn, where they found not an earthly King, but a little child who was crying on the straw bed of a manger. As a reward for their trouble and perseverance, a voice in their hearts told them that this was Jesus, the King of Kings and Saviour of the world.

Unfortunately, when we hear the divine call, no matter how clear and simple it is, we find a thousand excuses for delaying and perhaps for not responding to it at all. Let us humbly promise to be more generous in listening for it and more energetic in complying with it, regardless of the cost.

2. It was love which inspired the Magi. Love sustained them on their journey and made them fall prostrate in adoration before the Infant Jesus. Even before they offered Him material gifts they offered Him their hearts. As a reward for their faith and charity, God showered His graces upon them and an immense supernatural joy pervaded their souls. In that moment of adoration they received the highest possible reward for their hardships and perseverance. With deep interior joy they gave Jesus their hearts and never withdrew them. A pious tradition maintains that they became apostles and Saints, and in fact the church venerates them as such. We should follow the example of the Magi and promise before the cradle of the Infant Saviour that we shall face any sacrifice, even death, rather than offend Him, and shall work in every way possible for His glory and our sanctification.

3. The Magi gave Jesus material gifts also as symbols of their complete dedication to Him. They gave Him gold because He was a King; incense because He was God; and myrrh because He was man. We often say that we love God and wish to serve and obey Him in all things. But when we see that this entails sacrifice, we forget our promises.

We must ask ourselves if we are prepared to offer Jesus gold, that is, to offer Him everything we possess for the promotion of His glory, for the spread of His Kingdom, and for the relief of His poor, in whom we ought always to see and love Christ Himself. We must examine ourselves thoroughly on this. It is easy to find excuses for not giving to God and to His poor in accordance with our means. We should offer also the incense of our adoration and unceasing prayer. There can be no sanctity without prayer. There can be no real Christians without sanctity. Finally, we must offer the myrrh of our mortification. Mortification, as St. Vincent de Paul has said, is the ABC of Christian perfection. St. Paul exhorts us to carry always in ourselves the mortification of Jesus. If we are not mortified we can never be

holy and can never share the joy which the Magi experienced as they lay prostrate before the cradle of our Divine Redeemer.

7th January

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

I. Christianity alone offers an adequate explanation of the mystery of suffering. Why is there such a thing as suffering? The problem is a profound one, and the explanations suggested by various schools of philosophy fail to satisfy the human heart and leave the mind in doubt. Christian doctrine tells us that God is infinitely good, but also infinitely just. Being infinitely good, He created man without suffering. He also gave man the wonderful gift of liberty, which man abused by committing sin. Once the sin had been committed, God in His infinite justice demanded expiation. Hence suffering and death . . . *and through sin death, and thus death has passed unto all men because all have sinned.*¹ Together with death came the never-ending series of misfortunes, of physical and moral sufferings, which beset humanity.

Suffering, then, does not come directly from God. It is a consequence of, and a punishment for, sin. But there is also the aspect of expiation and redemption. God in His infinite justice demands from man a penalty for his sin, but He does not cease to be infinitely good. Hence, to the mystery of suffering there is added the mystery of the Redemption. The Son of God Himself is made man and takes upon Himself all our sins. For the full expiation of our sins He, the "Man of Sorrows", offers to the Eternal Father His own sufferings of infinite value.

It would not be right, however, if we were to remain inactive in this work of redemption. Like Jesus, we must bow our heads before our Cross and embrace it with resignation and love. We

must unite our sufferings with those of our Redeemer for the expiation of our sins.

2. There are some, unfortunately, who rebel under the lash of pain. "God is not good," they say. "If He were good, He would not permit suffering. God does not love me. If He loved me, He would not make me suffer."

This is false, of course. God did not create suffering. It was man who brought it into being by his sins and excesses. God, Who always draws good from evil, knows how to draw great good even from suffering, in the way of expiation, redemption, and propitiation for our sins. Precisely because He loves us, God permits our sufferings. He knows well that they purify and refine us as fire purifies and refines gold. They raise our thoughts to heaven.

God permits suffering for our spiritual welfare. But because it has this elevating and propitiatory power, we ought to receive it with an act of resignation and love, as Jesus did in Gethsemane. We should unite our sufferings with those of our Redeemer, which have an infinite value before our Heavenly Father.

3. Jesus is the head of the Mystical Body of the Church and we are its members. We ought to suffer with submission and love as He did. Rebellion increases and aggravates the pain. Resignation and love, on the other hand, lighten it, making it meritorious and even welcome. It is a consolation to suffer with Jesus. St. Paul says: *I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake; and what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ I fill up in my flesh for his body, which is the Church.*² In other words, the passion of Christ demands our submissive and joyful co-operation in suffering along with Jesus.

The Acts says of the Apostles: *So they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*³

"So great is the reward which awaits me," exclaimed St. Francis, "every suffering is pure joy to me!" He knew well that

the sorrows of this world are very tiny compared with the wonderful recompense which awaits us in Heaven. *The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us.*⁴

¹ Rom. 5, 12.² Col. 1, 24.³ Acts 5, 41.⁴ Rom. 8, 18.

8th January

THE APOSTOLATE OF SUFFERING

1. In God's plan suffering has a special mission. One might even call it a kind of apostolate. Suffering reminds us continually that we have not been made for this world, but are on a journey towards eternity. *Here we have no permanent city, but we seek for the city that is to come.*¹

Suffering is a spur which lifts our gaze towards Heaven, our real home, in which we shall find a happiness which will have no end. It would be disastrous if there were no suffering in this world. It is the salt which preserves from corruption our poor, fallen nature, tainted by sin. When everything is going well and the passing pleasures of this life hold us fascinated, it is too easy to set our hearts on things below and to forget God. But when our bodies are racked with pain and our minds are troubled and lonely, then an inward turmoil seems to detach us from this earth and causes us to raise our tear-filled eyes towards Heaven. Purified and almost renovated, our hearts turn towards God, our one, true and supreme good.

2. This is why the Saints loved suffering. Not only did they accept it with complete resignation, but they desired and requested it from God. "Either to suffer or to die," was the plea of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. St. Mary Magdalene del Pazzi even added: "To suffer and not to die." How well the Saints understood the mission which God has entrusted to suffering!

If it is accepted with faith, resignation and love, it can make us living images of Jesus, Who suffered beneath the weight of the Cross and died upon it, His hands and feet pierced with nails, His head crowned with thorns, while He prayed for us and for all those who had crucified Him.

3. Suffering has a still further purpose. Besides bearing the role of an apostolate in our own lives, it can also be an apostolate for others. We can offer our sufferings and sorrows to God, not only for our own spiritual advancement, but also for the expiation of the sins of the human race, for our enemies, for the persecutors of the Church, and for all the other suffering members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In this way we can accomplish great good and can acquire great merit before God. As a result of our offering, how many hearts hardened in sin, or how many souls forgetful of Heaven, may be touched by the grace of God? Let us suffer with Jesus. He alone can ease our pain and make it meritorious for ourselves and for others.

¹ Heb. 13, 14.

9th January

DEATH

1. Death, like suffering, is the result of sin: *Through sin death.*¹ But it is more than a punishment for sin. It is also a liberation for the just who, like St. Francis of Assisi look upon death as the good sister who will come one day to set them free and unite them with Christ in everlasting happiness. *Desiring to depart and to be with Christ . . .*²

Death is certainly a fearful thing. It is the violent separation of the soul from the body. The mere thought makes us tremble, for our eternal happiness or misery depends on this moment. But if we lead good Christian lives, if we strive with the help

of divine grace to avoid sin and to do what is good, death is no longer terrible. Death is now a reward. It is the paradise which awaits us. Even in the mystery of death, the justice of God is interwoven with His mercy. As He punishes us in order to correct us, so He makes us die in order to bestow on us the joys of Heaven.

2. In theory, everybody believes in death. In practice, many live as if they did not believe in it. So it is necessary and helpful for us to meditate on death. We began to die on the day when we were born. People say: "I have lived twenty, thirty, or forty years." But if they said "I have used up twenty or thirty or forty years of my life", how many would then be left? We do not know. We only know that death will come at the very moment when we least expect it. Let us be always prepared. *You also must be ready, because at an hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming.*³

We must always be ready. Let our faith be lively and active and our minds turned towards God Who is waiting for us. There is no need to be afraid. He is good and merciful. He desires our salvation. This is a wonderfully consoling thought. God desires my salvation! Let us surrender ourselves to Him, therefore, as if we had to die this very moment.

3. The greatest lesson in life springs from reflection on death. Whoever does not learn from death how to live will never learn anything from anybody. We must die, and we die only once. This is a test which we shall never have a chance to repeat. This thought should inspire in us a healthy fear of sin and an ardent desire to be more closely united with God and more faithful in the observance of His law.

As a special fruit of this meditation, let us form the resolution of asking for the last sacraments at the hour of death, instead of waiting until our relations are obliged to exhort us to receive them. It is not a sentence, but a gift for which we ask. It is the greatest gift which God's mercy could grant us in that final and

decisive moment of our lives. There is another resolution which we ought to make. We should live every day as if it were our last, but we should work as tirelessly as if we never had to die.

¹ Rom. 5, 12.

² Phil. 1, 23.

³ Luke 12, 40.

10th January

THE DEATH OF THE SINNER AS OPPOSED TO THAT OF THE JUST MAN

1. The sinner must die also. For him death is really terrible. Imagine him lying on his deathbed, instinctively aware that his life is over. The past will rise up to reproach him, a past full of sin and of ingratitude towards his Creator and Redeemer. The plans which he has centred around profit, ambition, and honour will have vanished like smoke. His friends will have either deserted him or will be at hand to utter useless words which will have no power to comfort him. Now he must stand alone, alone before God.

What will happen at that moment? Perhaps despair will overcome his soul, as it overcame the soul of Judas? Perhaps the innumerable graces which he has despised will tip the balance of Divine Justice towards the abyss of damnation? Or will a final ray of mercy pierce his tired mind, burning with remorse, so that with its last throb his poor heart will turn towards God and implore His pardon? Who can say? It is certain, however, that of the two thieves dying beside the Cross of our Redeemer, only one heard Him say: "This day you will be with me in Paradise!" The other remained obdurate in his sin. It is the height of stupidity to wait to be converted at the hour of death.

2. Consider now the death of the just man. Through his dying tears he also will see the world slipping away from him. But one thing will remain to comfort him, namely, the memory of

his good actions, of the virtues he acquired, of his fervent prayers, and of his voluntary mortifications. Above all, there will remain his great love for God, for Whom he has lived, worked and drawn breath. In that moment, this love will even increase the flaming desire consuming his poor, frail body to be united to God. He will be able to say, as some of the Saints have said: "I never thought it would be so sweet to die." With St. Louis, he will be able to say: *I am going joyfully to meet my God.* He will be able to exclaim with St. Charles: "*I long for my body to be dissolved so that I may be with Christ!*"¹

In the sight of God, the death of the good man is a very precious thing. *Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones.*²

3. Now that we have witnessed these contrasting scenes, let us examine ourselves in the presence of God. Let each of us ask: What will be my fate? If we can rank ourselves amongst the just, let us thank God. We are not there on our own merits. *By the grace of God I am what I am.*³

Perhaps we need only reproach ourselves with some deficiency or weakness, but have at the same time a strong desire to serve God and a great love for Him. In this case, we can take heart. We can cast ourselves into the merciful arms of God. But if, on the other hand, we are hardened and habitual sinners, then woe betide us! Perhaps this meditation is the last grace which God will bestow on us.

¹ Phil. 1, 23.

² Ps. 115, 6.

³ 1 Cor. 15, 10.

11th January

THE PARTICULAR AND GENERAL JUDGMENTS

1. *It is appointed unto men to die once and after this comes the judgment.*¹

To have to appear before the face of the Living God is terrifying for everybody. How much more terrifying will it be for the sinner? Weighed down by numberless sins, he will stand before the scrutinising gaze of God. He will be able to hide nothing. Everything will be evident and clear. The countenance of our Divine Redeemer, which was mild and merciful during life, will at that moment be that of a severe and just judge. After having scorned so many graces, after having spurned so many calls to conversion and so many secret inspirations to change his life, after dying unrepentant . . . behold the sinner in the presence of his Eternal Judge. At that moment he will hear the irrevocable sentence resounding in his ears: *Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.*² This terrible condemnation will be publicly repeated, moreover, at the general judgment.

2. How consoling, on the other hand, the last judgment will be for those who have led good lives. They will see God looking upon them with love and mercy and will hear from Him the wonderful invitation: *Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*³

On the day of the general judgment these words will be repeated for the confusion of the wicked and the consolation of the good.

Now that we have considered both sides of the picture, let us think deeply about it. We shall have to render an account of all the evil we have done, of all the good things we did badly or from distorted motives, of all the good actions we omitted to do, and of all the time we wasted. Let us examine our consciences carefully before God, our supreme Judge. Let us form whatever firm and worthwhile resolutions seem to be demanded by the circumstances of our lives. Remember that as we have lived, so shall we die, and we shall be judged accordingly.

3. St. Catherine of Siena believed that loyalty to the church and devotion to the Blessed Virgin were two pledges of salvation.

In one of her letters she wrote that "he will not die forever who serves the church faithfully." Elsewhere she said that "out of reverence for the Word, the Divine Goodness has granted Our Lady the privilege that any man, good or sinful, who pays her due honour, will not be taken captive by the devil." Consequently, we need not be inordinately afraid of death or of the final judgment, if we love the Church, obey her commandments, and work generously for her triumph in the universe, and if we show a filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin, pray to her and imitate her in virtue as far as possible.

It will be profitable for us to think about death and the last judgment.⁴ It will moderate our impatience in tribulations and our inordinate pleasure in consolations. It will be a stimulus to perseverance in good action.

¹ Heb. 9, 27.² Mt. 25, 41.³ Mt. 25, 35.⁴ Cf. Eccus. 7, 36.

12th January

HELL

1. *In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin.*¹

The meditation considered by the masters of the spiritual life to be the most useful for rousing the soul from sin, or from a state of torpor, is that on the last things, in other words, on what will happen to us at the end of life. Amongst these last things, hell is the most terrifying. Yet, if the mercy of God did not sustain us, we could fall into hell at any moment. St. John Chrysostom meditated on hell every day. All the Saints have found in this meditation the first steps on the way to perfection. Remember that a single mortal sin would merit hell for us. In that moment the sinner could have been already hurled into that abyss of

torments. Let us imagine that we are there . . . and that the goodness and mercy of God has released us from those everlasting, all-devouring flames. If this should happen, all the sacrifices which virtue demands would seem so easy and pleasant. How ready we should be to do anything sooner than return to that chasm of eternal sorrow!

2. In that place of never-ending suffering there will be three punishments to torture us. There will be the worm of conscience which does not die: *Their worm dies not.*² This is the awful realisation that we could have saved ourselves, but are lost for all eternity; that God gave us so many graces and we damned ourselves by abusing them. Now there is no longer any remedy, because the mercy of God has been succeeded once and for all by His justice.

In the second place, there is fire. This is a real fire, but altogether different from the material fire we know in this world, which was created by God for our benefit and service. The fire of hell, on the other hand, was created by Divine Justice purely to punish us. It is a special kind of fire which tortures body and soul, and the rebel angels as well as damned human beings. It could be called discerning in so far as it torments more or less mercilessly according to the gravity of the sin. These flames embrace every evil and exclude every good. They are flames which will never be extinguished, flames which burn, but do not consume, flames without light, dark and accompanied by the shrieking of eternal despair. The very thought of this horrible dungeon of torments should spur us on to begin immediately a life of virtue and Christian perfection.

3. The greatest punishment, however, will be that of loss. This is the knowledge that we have lost for ever our one, true, and highest good, God Himself. The soul will now understand fully what it means to have lost God for ever. It will feel irresistibly the need to be united with Him, and to see, enjoy and love Him. But at the same time it will know that God

has cast it away from Himself for all eternity. "Go, accursed soul, into everlasting fire!" Then the irresistible need for God will turn to hate and eternal malediction.

The terrifying reality of hell should not leave us amazed, as if it were an act of implacable severity. Rather should it be a warning to us. God should not seem to us to be a pitiless judge, but a judge who is infinitely just and infinitely good. Rather than send us to hell, God gave us His only-begotten Son, Who died on the cross for our sins. Just as the Redemption is a work of infinite love and goodness, so hell is a work of infinite justice.

If we reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation, on the Redemption and on the death of the Son of God, it will appear that, omnipotent though He is, He could not have done more to save us. The divine work of the Redemption explains the mystery of the eternity of hell. It is not God Who is relentless. It is the damned soul which was relentlessly ungrateful towards the infinitely good and merciful God.

¹ Eccus. 7, 36.

² Mark. 9, 43.

13th January

HEAVEN

I. Faith teaches us that the soul which is in the state of grace and has expiated all the temporal punishment due to its sins, goes immediately to Heaven when it is separated from the body. There the soul enjoys eternal happiness. It sees God face to face. It sees Him without any intervention of created things, but as He is in Himself in the Unity and Trinity of His infinite perfections.

In this beatific vision the intellect remains completely satisfied, because in God there is every truth, beauty and goodness. The

will abandon itself entirely to the will of God, desiring nothing else and loving nothing else but God alone. There springs from this abandonment a love which satisfies every desire, an inexpressible joy and a boundless peace. The happy soul will see the Blessed Virgin, too, and she will smile upon it with maternal tenderness. It will see the Angels and Saints gathered around the King of Kings and the Queen of Heaven, singing their praises. St. Paul, who was taken up to the third Heaven, tells us that it is impossible to imagine or to describe the unknown joys which are experienced there. In comparison with the eternal happiness of Heaven, the poor pleasures of this world are empty shadows. We cannot imagine the happiness of those who have gained Heaven by their good lives upon earth. The concept of Heaven is so beautiful and immense that it caused the Saints to desire death as a means of going there. They welcomed suffering, too, because it brought them nearer to their goal.

2. Our souls have an innate desire to be happy. God Himself has placed this desire in our hearts. What else are we doing all our lives but trying by every possible means to be happy? Unfortunately, we seek happiness where it is not to be found. Some seek it in material gain, others in honours, others in pleasure. But our hearts are much wider than the riches and honours and pleasures of this world. In comparison with the riches of the human spirit, worldly wealth is a very insignificant thing. Worldly honours are shadows which pass. As the "Imitation of Christ" reminds us, we are what we are before God, not what we appear to be before men.¹ Pleasure also passes quickly, and when it is immoderate it leaves in our hearts a sense of emptiness and disgust. St. Augustine had a good deal of experience of the deceptiveness and complexity of human happiness. He had reason to exclaim: *You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless except in You.*² We should follow the example of the Saints and aim at Heaven in everything we do. This should be the goal of our earthly

journey. We should make sure that all our actions are in conformity with the will of God and directed towards this end.

3. God desires our salvation. *God wishes all men to be saved.*³

We are all aspirants to Heaven. We shall not be denied the grace of God so long as we ask for it with confidence and perseverance. St. Augustine tells us that Paradise is ours if we wish: *You are not called to embrace the earth, but to prepare yourselves for Heaven; not to the successes of this world nor to a short-lived and transient prosperity, but to eternal life together with the Angels.*⁴

Contemplate this true and everlasting happiness. Let us direct towards it our intentions and desires and all our work. Then the day will come when we shall be really happy for all eternity.

¹ Book III, Chapter 50, 8.

² Confessions, II, 2, 4.

³ 1 Tim. 2, 4.

⁴ Serm. 296, 6, 7.

14th January

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP

I. Forget the series of useless and often academic questions which the philosophers asked concerning the nature of friendship. Cicero's definition, however, is worth recording, because it is not far from the Christian concept of friendship. Friends, he says, are those who are united by a bond of affection and of agreement in matters of spiritual and human importance. True friendship is the result of a mysterious and mutual attraction between two persons, who grow to know, respect and love one another.¹ This friendship would be fleeting and even dangerous if it were nourished by the body rather than by the soul. The soul is eternal. Therefore its love is lasting and passes on into eternity. The body, like the flowers in the fields, is pleasing for a while, then fades and dies. St. Augustine tells us in his Confessions that he was passionately attached to a young

man of his own age, who was blooming with the flower of adolescence. But he adds immediately that this was not a genuine friendship, because it did not spring from the charity which the Spirit of God pours into our hearts.² These so-called particular friendships should be avoided as dangerous and contrary to Christian teaching.

2. Cicero also saw virtue as the basis of friendship.³ He said rightly that sincere friendship can exist only between good people.⁴ But the Christian concept of friendship is even deeper. It touches on the supernatural order. True friends love one another in God. Their love must be founded on divine charity.⁵

There is something sacred about friendship in the Christian sense of the word. Mutual love is fostered and elevated by divine charity. Friends love one another not only in this life but also in eternal life. They give one another advice. They help one another along the ascending path of virtue, and not merely towards human achievements. They know that their love will last for ever in Heaven.

We should be very grateful to God if we can find a real friend in the full Christian sense. He will be a great consolation and help to us in temporal matters, but above all in our spiritual needs.

3. We should always remember what *The Imitation of Christ* has to say about friendship. "In me the love of thy friend ought to stand," God is represented as saying, "and for me is he to be loved who ever he be, that appeareth to thee good and much to be loved in this life. Without me friendship can neither profit nor endure; nor is that love true and pure which I do not bind together."⁶

If we allow ourselves to be guided by these principles, a friend will be a real treasure. He will be a treasure which we shall not lose on earth and which will help us to gain Heaven. The words of St. Augustine are consoling. "We cannot lose a friend, if he is dear to us in God Who is never lost."⁷

Let us cultivate friendship, but let it be Christian friendship

founded on these principles, which come from God and lead us back to Him.

¹ De Amic., VI.

² St. Augustine Confes. IV, 4, 7.

³ Cic., De Amic., XXVII.

⁴ De Amic., V.

⁵ St. Augustine, Confes. IV, 4, 7.

⁶ Imit. of Christ, Bk. III, c. 42, 1.

⁷ St. Augustine, Confes. IV, 4, 7.

15th January

THE PROPER USE OF TIME

1. "Time is money," runs an old English proverb. But for a Christian time is something much more important. It is the price of eternity. With time well spent or badly spent we can purchase a life of eternal happiness with God or of eternal suffering in hell. Since our true destiny is God and everlasting happiness, all the time which we spend with this in view is well spent, whereas all that is not devoted to this end is useless or harmful.

We must make a special effort to avoid sloth. There is good reason for calling it the father of vices. When a man surrenders to laziness he is squandering a priceless treasure which was intended to be used in the service of God and for the sanctification of his own soul and the souls of his fellowmen. He is also disobeying the clear command which God issued after the sin of Adam: *In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.*¹

The man who is steeped in sloth, moreover, is more vulnerable to the temptations of the devil, the suggestions of the flesh and the frivolous attractions of the world. If our hands are not employed in labour or our minds occupied in study or prayer, we can easily be diverted from our proper purpose and drawn towards sin.

2. The high value of the divine gift of time imposes an obligation on us to avoid laziness. The obligation to avoid sin is still greater. Sin is the most serious way in which we can

abuse this gift of God. It is also an act of deep ingratitude in that we turn this treasure which God has bestowed on us into a weapon to be used against the giver of every good. To use time properly it is necessary to direct all our actions, intentions, and desires towards God, Who is the source of our being and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage.

If everything we do, intend, or desire springs from our love of God and is aimed at the manifestation of His glory and the expansion of His kingdom upon earth, then even our most humble and apparently indifferent actions are precious in the sight of the Most High and receive His blessing. But if we are working for ourselves, for our own satisfaction and petty glorification, we ruin everything. All that we do is barren. If we seek ourselves instead of God, we shall hear Him say one day: *You shall have no reward with your Father in Heaven.*²

3. As we have said, work, whether manual or mental, is a command of God. We must all work in accordance with our position in life. But work is more than a duty and a natural right. It is also a pleasure. One might say that when we work we are participating in God's work of creation and conservation.

Work makes man noble. Laziness reduces him to an animal level. *The Imitation of Christ* says: "Rejoice in the evening if you have spent the day profitably." But if we wish this joy to be complete and to last throughout eternity, we must work all the time for God. The effect of this meditation should be a constant dedication of all our actions to God.

¹ Gen. 3, 19.

² Mt. 6, 1.

16th January

THE HELP OF GOD

I. Both in the natural and in the supernatural order, we are in continual need of the help of God. We did not exist, and God

in His infinite goodness created us. It is He Who preserves us in existence from day to day and from moment to moment. The act of conservation is like a continuous creation. If God did not sustain us, we should return immediately to the dust from which we came: *Remember, man, that dust you are and unto dust you shall return.*¹

We are continually dependent on our Lord and Creator for our existence and activity. If we remained always aware of this tremendous fact, we would never offend God. We would show Him a filial gratitude and humbly implore His assistance.

We are so poor, and He is so rich. We are so weak and He is so strong. We are blind, and He is the true light which illumines every man who comes into the world.² Ask for God's help with confidence, perseverance, and resignation to His holy will. As St. Augustine says, we are the beggars of God.

2. There are several passages in Sacred Scripture which emphasise clearly and effectively our utter weakness and dependence on God. "*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves,*" says St. Paul, "*to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*"³

Jesus warns us that without Him we can do nothing: *Without me you can do nothing.*⁴ He uses the allegory of the vine and the branches as an illustration of this. I am the vine, He says, and you are the branches. So it is necessary for you to remain united to me, and I to you. In the same way as a branch that does not live on in the vine can yield no fruit of itself, so you can do nothing if you do not live on in Me. If anyone does not remain united to Me he will be like a withered branch which is thrown into the fire to be burned.⁵

We must remain united to Jesus, therefore, if we wish to do anything good and to merit everlasting life. Otherwise the supernatural life of grace will not be transmitted to us. If Jesus is not there, death comes into our souls. Let us remain close to our Divine Redeemer. If we continue to live in Him, He will give

us everything we ask as He has promised: *If you abide in me, and if my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you.*⁶

3. Do not think, however, that it is sufficient to ask for God's help in order to do good. There is no doubt that His assistance is absolutely essential; but our co-operation with divine grace is equally necessary. The branch on the vine is not inactive. It derives its vitality from the vine and in its turn bears fruit. In the same way we must nurture the supernatural life which God infuses into our souls so that it will mature in good works.

The essence of a holy apostolate is co-operation with the grace of God. This spirit of generous co-operation must transform us personally so that we may be able to change others. This is how the Apostles and Saints acted; this is how we must all act. "*By the grace of God I am what I am,*" St. Paul tells us, "*and his grace in me has not been fruitless—in fact, I have laboured more than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*"⁷

Implore God's help with humble perseverance. Be faithful to it in an ardent spirit of sacrifice. This is what it means to be a Christian.

¹ Gen. 3, 19.

² John 1, 9.

³ 2 Cor. 3, 5.

⁴ John 15, 5.

⁵ John 15.

⁶ John 15, 7.

⁷ 1 Cor. 15, 10.

17th January

THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE

1. There are times when life is like a stream which flows peacefully between two flower-strewn grassbanks. The sun shines brightly overhead and the whole world seems to smile. The days pass pleasantly and the future is full of fair promise.

Virtue itself seems to flower effortlessly in our hearts. But God grants these intervals of rest during our earthly voyage so that we may renew our energy.

Life is a battle. Therefore we have to be armed and ready and always on the alert.¹ “*Wait here and watch.*”² We must resolve to be prepared from the earliest hour of the morning to face the difficulties and temptations which can arise at any moment. We must be armed with the weapons of the spirit which we can easily obtain if we live all the time in the presence of God. If we fail to acquire this habit of spiritual watchfulness, the trials and temptations of the day will catch us off our guard and there is a danger that we may yield.

2. There are three kinds of trial which we have to expect:

(a) Suffering in the guise of illness or accidents.

(b) The insults, lack of understanding, and ingratitude of our fellowmen.

(c) Temptations and the allurements of sin.

We must make a spiritual preparation at the beginning of every day and surrender ourselves with filial confidence into the hands of God. Sorrow, illness and misfortune may come. Let us offer ourselves to God in our morning prayer. Like Jesus and with Jesus, let us bow beneath the cross which is laid upon us. Perhaps men will insult us and misunderstand us. Let us accept all this resignation and love for God and our neighbour, whoever he may be. In this we shall be like our Divine Redeemer Who, when He was nailed to the cross, not only forgave but prayed to His Eternal Father for those who had crucified Him. The enchantment of sin may disturb the peace and purity of the soul. In this matter especially we must prepare to resist from the very beginning of the day. We must intercede with God, fervently renew our resolutions, and turn our attention when necessary to other worthwhile thoughts and activities. Let us never panic, but place our trust in God. He will enable us to conquer.

3. Let this be our resolution and the result of our meditation. When we are tempted to sin, especially against holy purity, let us resist immediately and take flight. When we encounter misunderstanding on the part of others, or even coldness or calumny or injustice, let us not be depressed or annoyed. The only thing which should concern us is the evidence of our conscience before God. Offer everything else to God—joy or sorrow, praise or blame, honour or humiliation. Ask only for His grace. If we have that, we shall have peace of mind as well.

¹ Job 7, 1.

² Mt. 26, 38.

18th January

THE VENERATION AND IMITATION OF THE SAINTS

1. If anyone has the good fortune during his lifetime to meet a Saint, he should be very grateful to God. What a wonder a Saint is! He is a man in whom God lives in the fulness of His grace, in such a way that St. Paul could say: "*It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*"¹

He is a man of great spiritual tranquillity who by being master of things outside himself as well as of the inner powers of his own being, can pay the full homage of love and obedience to God. He is a man from whose glance there flashes the living image of God. He can be found on a bed of pain, in the rags of a beggar, beneath the purple of a Cardinal, in the solitude of a hermitage, or in the hurly-burly of modern life. It is all the same, because he is no longer involved with himself nor with the world. He seeks God alone, Who is his love and his glory. Such is a Saint. If we are not lucky enough to meet him in reality, we can and should read and meditate about his life. The literature of the

Saints is a practical complement to the Gospel, because it shows us how the Gospel should be lived.

2. Those Saints should be venerated who have been recognised as such by the Church. There is nothing to prevent us having devotion also to holy souls who have not received this formal recognition, and to baptised infants who died before reaching the use of reason. In the latter cases, however, only a private cult can be exercised.

The worship of the Saints is an act of veneration (*dulia*), not of adoration (*latria*), which can be given only to God. It is wrong to imagine, as many Protestants do, that by praying to and venerating the Saints we subtract something from the homage we owe to God. The veneration of the Saints and the adoration of God are entirely distinct activities. Moreover, the Saints are the faithful servants of God and intercede with Him on our behalf. By venerating and invoking them, we honour the Giver of all holiness. If anyone, on the other hand, were to disregard the worship of God in favour of devotion to the Saints, he would be making a serious mistake. A person who goes into a church and rushes over to a statue of the Blessed Virgin or of one of the Saints, without giving a thought to the living and real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, is developing a false and sentimental piety.

3. It is not enough simply to honour the Saints. We should love and imitate them as well. Following the example of the Saints, as St. Paul says, is the same as imitating Jesus Christ Himself.² It is a step towards Christian perfection. No matter what our circumstances, we have outstanding models to follow. From St. Francis of Assisi we can learn to be detached from worldly things, even to the point of loving poverty. From St. Philip Neri we can learn to despise honours and to make God and Heaven the object of our desires and actions. St. Francis de Sales, although he was by nature resentful and scathing, can

teach us how to be gentle and calm in all the trials of life. We can learn heroic love for the poor and unfortunate from St. Vincent de Paul. We can imitate the fervent apostolic work of St. Francis Xavier. St. Charles Borromeo sold his goods and gave all to the poor. During the plague in Milan he dedicated himself lovingly to the care of the unfortunate victims, selling his household furniture and even his bed, so that he had nothing left to sleep on but a table. We can learn from his example how the flame of Christ's charity can transform the heart and overcome all human wretchedness. Above all, let us remember that our devotion to the Saints will be valueless if it is not accompanied by untiring efforts to follow their example.

¹ Gal. 2, 20.

² 1 Cor. 4, 16.

19th January

THE CHURCH

1. Jesus Christ did not found the Church only as the mystical Body of which He is the Head and we are the members. He also made it a visible and hierarchical society, the supreme authority in doctrine and morals, the distributor of His grace and of the means of Redemption. If He had not done this, it would be impossible to understand how men could have carried on the saving work of the Redeemer throughout the centuries.

The Church is Jesus' masterpiece. It is empowered by His grace and authority to enlighten men and guide them safely along the path of sanctity. Jesus said to His Apostles and through them to their successors: *He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me.*¹ He also said: *I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.*²

This is why obedience is our first duty to the successors of the

Apostles, in other words, to the hierarchical church. We must obey the Church as we would obey Christ. Anybody who makes exceptions or compromises in this matter is not a true Christian.

2. Besides being our infallible teacher, the Church is also our affectionate Mother. Along with the inexhaustible treasury of His graces, it has inherited from Jesus His infinite love for all mankind. Let us consider what the Church does and has done for us. As soon as we are born into this mortal life, She gives us through the waters of Baptism a second life which is supernatural and everlasting. When we are a little older and exposed to the onslaughts of evil, She strengthens us in grace by means of another Sacrament, and makes us soldiers of Christ. If in spite of this we fall into sin, She is by our side once more. She raises us up. In the Sacrament of Penance She gives us God's forgiveness and the spiritual strength to rise again. Moreover, She gives us Jesus Christ Himself in the Blessed Eucharist. By means of another Sacrament She elevates those who receive the power of Orders. In yet another She blesses and consecrates matrimonial love and the pure marriage union. When we are dying, She comes compassionately to our side again and through the final Sacrament gives us strength and purity of purpose for the great journey into eternity. Nor is this enough. She is present with her prayers and blessings even by our coffin and by our graveside.

We owe the Church more than obedience. We owe Her our love. We should love very much this good Mother who accompanies us from the cradle to the grave, from our birth upon earth to our spiritual birth into everlasting happiness.

3. But this love should not be so much empty sentiment. Do we see the Church insulted, despised and persecuted? We must defend Her by every means at our disposal. If necessary, we must even die for Her.

Do we hear the Church slandered even as Jesus was slandered? If so we must learn to be on our guard against these calumnies

and to contradict them in front of others. If She is suffering, we must comfort Her. If She is in need, we must succour Her. If She requires more Apostles who will extend Her sway amongst heretics and pagans, we must be generous in offering our money and our prayers.

Pray very specially and very often for the Church and for Her triumph, which is the triumph of the kingdom of God upon earth.

¹ Luke 10, 16.

² Mt. 28, 20.

20th January

THE POPE

I. The words with which a great Bishop and orator, Bossuet, began the funeral oration of a great king, are well remembered in history: "God alone is great." This is true in the absolute sense of the word. We are all insignificant, because any greatness which we can possess is not ours, but comes from God.

There is in the world, however, one man in whom the greatness of God is reflected in the most outstanding way of all. He participates in the authority and in a certain sense in the personality of Christ. This man is the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Pope.

It is necessary to think deeply about certain words of our Redeemer which the Protestants and schismatics of every age seem to be anxious to forget. These words were addressed to Peter and through him to all his successors in the Church which was destined to last till the end of time.¹ "*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 also in heaven.”² And again: “Feed my lambs . . . Feed my lambs . . . Feed my sheep.”³

These words need to be thought about rather than explained. The Church is compared to a building which must rest upon one foundation stone: the Pope. The Church is compared to a flock which has only one shepherd: the Pope. To him is entrusted the divine power of binding and loosing upon earth. This power is granted to him personally. It is given to the other Apostles only as a group united to him.

2. The greatness of the Pope derives entirely from the words of the Gospel just quoted. But it is probable that nobody commented on them so beautifully as St. Bernard when he wrote to his former pupil who had ascended the throne of St. Peter. “*Quis es? Sacerdos Magnus, Summus Pontifex, tu princeps episcoporum, tu heres Apostolorum . . . dignitate Aaron . . . potestate Petrus, unctione Christus. Tu es, cui claves traditae sunt, cui oves creditae sunt. Sunt quidem et alii caeli ianitores et gregum pastores; sed tu tanto gloriosius, quanto et differentius prae caeteris nomen hereditasti. Habent illi assignatos greges singuli singulos; tibi universi crediti sunt, uni unus: nec modo ovium sed et pastorum omnium, tu unus pastor.*”⁴

These words, almost incapable of being translated because of their tremendous power, fully express the greatness of the Pope. He is Priest and Supreme Pontiff, the Prince of Bishops, the heir of the Apostles, the living Peter, Christ Himself . . . To him are entrusted the keys of Heaven which he can open or close; to him alone, as to one supreme Pastor, is entrusted the whole flock of the faithful and of shepherds alike. His power extends to the ends of the world and is under the protection of God, Who has promised to confirm in Heaven whatever he will decree upon earth. His dignity and authority, then, are almost divine.

3. Let us bow humbly before such greatness. Let us promise

to obey the Pope as we would Christ. When he defines doctrine as supreme Head of the Church, he is infallible. When he commands or exhorts, he does so in the name of God. We cannot dispute or murmur against anything which he teaches or decrees. To disobey the Pope is to disobey God. To argue or murmur against the Pope is to argue or murmur against Jesus Himself. When we are confronted with His commands, we have only one choice—absolute obedience and complete surrender. Moreover, we owe the Pope our veneration and love. If we love the Pope, it is like loving Christ. Pray for the Pope, that his commands and desires may be fully realised for the greater triumph of God's kingdom upon earth.

¹ Mt. 28, 20.

² Mt. 16, 18-19.

³ John 21, 15-17.

⁴ St. Bernard, De Consid., II, 8.

21st January

HUMILITY

1. Humility is the most difficult of all the virtues because it requires us to deny ourselves. Jesus warns us that anyone who wishes to follow Him must deny himself. *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.*¹

Humility is necessary if we wish to go straight to Jesus, Who was the first to humble Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross.² *The Imitation of Christ* contains some profound remarks upon this subject. "Seldom do we find anyone so spiritual as to be stripped of all things . . . If a man gives his whole substance, still it is nothing. And if he do great penance, it is but little. And if he attain to all knowledge, he is far off still. And if he have great virtue and very fervent devotion, there is still much wanting to him, namely, the one

thing which is supremely necessary for him. What is that? That having left all things else, he leave also himself, and wholly go out of himself, and retain nothing of self—love.”³

When he has done all this, remember, he has only given God all that he received from Him. He has given nothing which was really his. He has only fulfilled an obligation of restitution. When he has arrived at this stage of humility, therefore, he should repeat the words of Jesus. “*When you have done everything that was commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.’*”⁴

This is genuine humility as preached in the Gospel.

2. Humility is, in fact, truth. Many think that it is a mental fiction or a pious exaggeration, and that only a few souls can really achieve it.

In other words, we must disregard ourselves. We must be content to be unknown and unesteemed. This might seem to be contrary to, or at least superior to, human nature, but it is based on the simple, naked truth. What have we that is not a gift of God? All that we have in the natural and supernatural order, we have received from God: “*What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?*”⁵

Our defects and sins are the only things which are really ours. So we have a double motive for humility. Everything good about us is a gift from God. Only our sins belong to us!

3. Some people realise that they can achieve something good or beautiful by making use of their natural gifts along with the grace of God. Meanwhile they see others failing where they succeeded. As a result they are lacking in humility. Theirs is a mistaken attitude. Do we know what difference there is between the gifts God has given us and those He has given to others? Even if God has granted us greater natural and spiritual gifts, surely this is a motive for humility rather than pride? St. Thérèse

of the Child Jesus was accustomed to ask God's forgiveness not only for the sins which she had committed, but also for those which she would have committed if God had not given her such exceptional graces.

The graces and favours which God has bestowed on us should present new reasons for being humble when we reflect on how ungratefully we have used them. Let us always remember that "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*"⁶

¹ Mt. 16, 24.² Phil. 2, 8.³ Imit. of Christ, Bk. II, Chapter 11, 4.⁴ Luke 17, 10.⁵ I Cor. 4, 7.⁶ James 4, 6.

22nd January

SELF-DENIAL

I. Even though it may not have been put into practice very much, contempt for riches had been taught by some of the ancient pagan philosophers. Nobody before Christ, however, even thought of demanding self-renunciation as well. Self-denial might seem to be a degradation and almost an annihilation of human nature. It might appear quite impossible. Nevertheless, Jesus has said: "*If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*"¹

Would God have commanded us to do something impossible? Certainly not. As St. Augustine says, our divine Redeemer did not order us to do anything impossible, but to do whatever is perfect. Perfection is admittedly difficult, but it is not impossible. Should we answer Jesus Christ's command in the same way as the disciples did on one occasion: *This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?*² No, our reply must be that which St. Peter gave when Our Lord asked reproachfully: "*Do you also wish to go away?*"³ We must repeat with Peter: "*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.*"⁴

2. Let us examine carefully what is meant by this self-denial. It makes two main demands on us. Firstly, we must renounce all those lower impulses and desires which besiege the soul.⁵ This means that we have to control and discipline our passions. Since original sin has corrupted our nature, these passions must be restrained and conquered, and then directed towards good objects. Our passions must be changed into virtues. This is a hard task, to accomplish which we must employ both natural and supernatural means.

But we cannot stop at this. The second requirement will cost us even more. We must renounce our own ego, our own will. How can we do this? We must no longer desire whatever is pleasing to us, but whatever is pleasing to God. Our will must cease, as it were, to belong to us in order to become the will of God. Is it the will of God that we should be sick, or poor, or humiliated? Thank God for it. Does He desire to give us consolations or honours or success? Thank Him for this, too. Desire nothing else but what He desires. We are no longer ourselves. Our will is completely absorbed in the will of God. This is not a degradation of human nature; it is its sublimation. Self-renunciation makes it possible for God to live and act in us. Anyone who reaches this goal can say with St. Paul: "*It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*"⁶

3. This denial of ourselves to the extent of identifying our will with the will of God produces in us a profound peace. The Saints scaled this height and found there that tranquility of spirit which led them to rejoice in martyrdom and dishonour. It was this peace of soul which made the dying St. Aloysius Gonzaga smile and say: "I am happy to be going." It was this which enabled the saintly Cardinal Fisher, when he was going to the scaffold, to behold a light which does not fail and say: *Commit to the Lord your way . . . He will make justice dawn for*

*you like the light.*⁷ This, too, is why the "Imitation of Christ" tells us that nobody is so free as he who knows how to deny himself.

¹ Mt. 16, 24.² John 6, 61.³ John 6, 68.⁴ John 6, 69.⁵ I Peter 2, 11.⁶ Gal. 2, 20.⁷ Ps. 36, 5-6.

23rd January

CARRYING OUR CROSS

1. When we have renounced ourselves in order to do the will of God in every detail, we must embrace our cross every day. We must carry it with resignation and love in the footsteps of Jesus. Each of us has his cross. It might be ill health or financial distress. It might be some person whom we feel to be intolerable and with whom we have to live. It might be humiliation or calumny. It might be some temptation which we find hard to fight and which is continually causing us to fall. It might be all these things together. Whatever it is, it is our cross.

To rebel would be to make things far worse. Our cross would only become heavier and more unbearable. Jesus tells us to embrace it as He did. He tells us to bow beneath its weight and follow Him. If we accept His invitation, at once our cross will seem lighter. A man who is in love does not feel fatigue. We must carry our cross out of love for God and in the hope of a heavenly reward. Then we can say with St. Francis de Sales: "Suffering passes, but the experience of having suffered for the love of God remains." We shall understand how true were Our Lord's words: "*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*"¹

The cross which we accept from the hands of Jesus and out of love for Him is a sweet burden.

2. There is only one way to become holy and to win Heaven. This is the way of the Cross. "The Imitation of Christ" contains

some moving thoughts on the subject of the royal way of the Cross. We shall summarise them here.

The words of Jesus seem hard to many: "Renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Me." But it would be much harder to hear on the last day those terrible words: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Those who listen now and accept the message of the Cross need not be afraid of hearing this irrevocable sentence on that day. Why avoid the way of the Cross if it is the only road which leads to Heaven? In the Cross there is salvation; in the Cross there is life; in the Cross there is protection from our enemies. If we carry our cross with submission and love, we shall find peace of soul. If we intertwine our cross with the Cross of Jesus, we shall obtain energy of mind, joy of spirit and perfect holiness. If we die on the Cross with Jesus, we shall live with Him in eternal happiness. If we are His companions in suffering, we shall also be with Him one day in glory.²

Everything depends on our dying on the Cross with Jesus. There is no other way to life and to true interior peace but the way of the holy cross and of daily mortification.³

3. We also read in *The Imitation of Christ*: "No man hath so heartfelt a sense of the Passion of Christ as he whose lot it hath been to suffer like things." If you carry your cross willingly, it will lead you to your longed-for destination, where suffering ends and everlasting joy begins. If you carry it unwillingly, the weight will become unbearable, and you will have to carry it in any case. If you fling away the cross which you are carrying, immediately an even heavier one will be laid upon you. So be prepared to put up with whatever trials God sends you. Look upon them as wonderful consolations, because the sufferings of this life cannot be regarded as the measure of that glory which will be ours in Heaven . . .⁴ We are fortunate if we deserve to suffer a little for the name of Jesus . . . Only when we begin to die to ourselves can we begin to live in God . . . Nothing is more

acceptable to God and more helpful for us in this world than to suffer willingly for love of Christ.⁵

¹ Mt. 11, 28.

² Rom. 6, 8.

³ Imit. of Christ, Bk, II, C. 12.

⁴ Rom. 8, 18.

⁵ Imit. of Christ, Bk. II, Chapter 12.

24th January

FOLLOWING JESUS

1. When we have renounced ourselves and have embraced our cross with resignation and love, we must follow Jesus. We must follow Him in a special way as the infallible Teacher of truth. The teachings of men cannot satisfy our intellects. Still less can they satisfy our hearts. What they teach is either incomplete or false. This is proved by the fact that the doctrines of men have succeeded and replaced one another down through the centuries, while "*the word of the Lord endures forever.*"¹

The teaching of Christ produces an extraordinary renovation in the individual, in the family, and in society. It is this renewal which we call Christianity and Christian civilisation. There is a wide chasm between paganism and Christianity. This gulf would be even wider only for the fact that Christianity has not yet been fully put into practice throughout the universe. There is only one reform necessary. This is to realise the Christian ideal everywhere. We must begin by carrying it out ourselves. Let us follow Jesus, Who is saying to us: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*"² "*He who follows Me does not walk in darkness.*"³

Let us follow our divine Master and we shall be sure that we are travelling towards Heaven.

2. Jesus is not only Truth; He is also Life. He is not only our Teacher: He is our Saviour as well. He has given us something which human philosophers could never give. For He has given us more than doctrine; He has also given us the means of putting

it into practice in our lives. He has given us grace and the Sacraments. He has even given us Himself in the Blessed Eucharist. It would be impossible for us to carry out His divine precepts if He did not give us the necessary spiritual strength to do so. We should be grateful to Jesus for His goodness and mercy. We should cherish the gifts which He has given us for our sanctification.

Follow Jesus, the Giver of grace and holiness. Make advantageous use of His Sacraments. Above all, receive the nourishment of His Divine Body with fervour and with love. In this Sacrament we can discover the unique spiritual force which makes men saints.

3. Jesus is also the Divine Model whom we ought to follow and imitate. In Him the virtues possess both the infinite splendour of the Divinity and the gentle appeal of glorified Humanity. Jesus does not dazzle us with His brightness, but kindly invites us to love and follow Him. *Learn from me*, He says, *for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.*⁴ After He has indicated humility, meekness and interior peace as the foundations of the spiritual life, He invites us to take up the yoke of His law and assures us that we shall find it light.⁵

If we follow Jesus, even though we are bowed with Him beneath the weight of the Cross, we shall experience even in this life a reflection of the peace and joy which will be our reward in Heaven.

¹ I Peter, I, 25.

² John 14, 6.

³ John 8, 12.

⁴ Mt. II, 29.

⁵ Mt. II.

25th January

MEDIOCRITY

1. A Christian cannot be satisfied with mediocrity. He must strive for perfection. This is the command of Jesus. *You therefore*

are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.¹ The same counsel is given in the Old Testament. *You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy.*² The Apostles had the habit of referring to all the Christians of their time as holy. For instance, St. Paul addresses the faithful of the church of Ephesus in this way,³ while St. Peter describes the Christian community as *a holy nation, a purchased people.*⁴

We cannot be content with half-hearted efforts, but must work hard to become holy. *I come, says Jesus, that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.*⁵ Some day we shall either be saints in Heaven or among the damned in Hell. Whoever is satisfied with mediocrity betrays the mission of Christ. He returns ingratitude for His infinite goodness and squanders His divine grace.

2. There is no such thing as half-way virtue.

Virtue is a struggle and a sacrifice. It presupposes a generous heart which gives itself to Jesus without reserve. Did He not give Himself completely for our sakes? Did He not die upon the cross for our salvation and reopen Heaven, which had been closed to us by sin? Moreover, did He not remain hidden in our midst under the Eucharistic species in order to become our sustenance and our support?

When we are faced with such goodness and generosity, can we be so niggardly as to offer God only a part of ourselves and perhaps a part which is worthless and perishable, as Cain did when he offered sacrifices from his fields and flocks? God would certainly turn away from us and refuse our gift. And then we should be lost for ever.

3. Mediocrity in the spiritual life inevitably paves the way for sin. Indifference at prayer, listlessness in practising charity, and habitual neglect of our duties in life lead first to deliberate venial sin and finally to mortal sin. If we are not generous with Jesus, Jesus will cease to be generous with us. He will no longer shower

us with His graces. Deprived of this heavenly dew, our souls will grow dry and incapable of producing fruits worthy of eternal life.

Let us get rid of any tendencies towards lassitude. Let us revive the divine charity in ourselves. Let us make firmer resolutions and pray more fervently that the grace of God will make us capable of greater effort.

¹ Mt. 5, 48.

² Lev. II, 44.

³ Eph. I, I.

⁴ I Peter, 2, 9.

⁵ John 10, 10.

26th January

BLESSED ARE THE POOR

I. "Blessed are the rich." This is the judgment of the world. But Jesus says: *Blessed are you poor.*¹ Whom are we to believe? Naturally, we must believe Jesus. A certain amount of confusion could arise, however, in our understanding of this maxim. It becomes clear from the context of St. Luke, and still clearer in the words of St. Matthew, who writes: *Blessed are the poor in spirit.*² It is necessary, therefore, as St. Jerome and others have commented, to be poor in our detachment from our possessions.

If a poor man longs for riches, and envies and hates the wealthy because of their possessions, he is not poor in spirit. So he cannot receive the blessing of which Our Lord spoke. In the same way, a rich man may be attached to his great wealth. Perhaps he aims at nothing else but to increase it and, because he is thinking of it all the time, neglects his duty to God and to his neighbour. Above all, love of riches may cause him to be lacking in justice and charity. The behaviour of such a man is contrary to the law of God. Meditate carefully on this point and do not neglect to make whatever resolutions seem necessary.

2. Detachment from riches implies the obligation of using them as a means of reaching eternal life and in accordance with the principles of justice and charity. This is a positive command of God which nobody can ignore without falling into sin to a greater or less extent. But over and beyond this general rule there is an evangelical counsel to which only the privileged few are called in their search for perfection. This evangelical counsel says to us: "*If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*"³

If we have received this great call to evangelical perfection, we must listen to it and follow Jesus promptly and generously. But even if our vocation does not lie in that direction, let us take care not to become too attached to the passing things of this world. Our hearts were not made for them, but for God.

Remember the striking words of St. Paul: *Brethren, the time is short; it remains that those who have wives be as if they had none; and those who weep, as though not weeping; and those who rejoice, as though not rejoicing; and those who buy, as though not possessing; and those who use the world, as though not using it, for this world as we see it is passing away.*⁴

3. Those who are really poor should not be too disturbed. If they are resigned to their poverty and are not consumed by the desire for riches, the blessing of the Gospel is theirs.

Let them remember that when Jesus became Man in order to redeem us, He did not choose to be wealthy. He chose to be the poorest of men. Similarly, Our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph and all the Saints were free from all desire of worldly possessions, so that there was room in their hearts only for God, their supreme good.

Let them remember also for their consolation that it is much easier for them to gain Heaven, because they are not weighed down by worldly cares.

Let us all love and aim at acquiring the true riches of the spirit, which are to be found now in the practice of virtue and later in Heaven.

¹ Luke 6, 20.

² Mt. 5, 3.

³ Mt. 19, 21. Mark 10, 21. Luke 12, 33. 18, 22.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7, 29-31.

27th January

THE RICH

I. Sacred Scripture has some very severe and terrible things to say to the rich. *Woe to you rich! for you are now having your comfort.*¹ *Amen I say to you, with difficulty will a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven. And further I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*² St. James adds: *Come now, you rich, weep and howl over your miseries which will come upon you. Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are rusted, and their rust will be a witness against you, and will devour your flesh as fire does. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who reaped your fields, which have been kept back by you unjustly, cry out, and their cry has entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. You have feasted upon earth, and you have nourished your hearts on dissipation in the days of slaughter.*³

These passages are not concerned with the rich as such, for men like Abraham, Job, and St. Louis, the King of France, were very wealthy. They are directed against those who have become absorbed in their wealth⁴ and have grown deaf to the rightful promptings of justice and of charity.

Nevertheless, it is not only the wealthy and unjust who should reflect seriously on these stern words, but also those who have more than they need in life and are never moved by compassion

for their less fortunate fellowmen. Can we be counted among these?

2. Wealth is a gift from God. Therefore it is good, like everything else which comes from God. Worldly wealth, as St. Thomas says, can be an instrument of virtue. But it is good only in so far as it leads to holiness. If it interferes with the practice of virtue, it is evil.⁵

God created the wealth of the earth, not for a few, but for all mankind. All men have the right, therefore, to draw their means of subsistence from the earth. If any individual with large private possessions, however lawfully acquired, battles against this right to live, he commits a grave sin. This could happen either because a man is lacking in justice or in charity. Both justice and charity are commanded by God, however, and it matters very little whether a man goes to hell because he has offended against justice or because he has offended against charity. Hell is Hell in either case.

Let us examine ourselves and see if we are lacking in either of the virtues. It is certain that there would not be so much misery and want in the world if the Gospel teaching on the virtues of justice and charity had ever really triumphed.

3. A very rich man who was convinced that he was a good Christian went to confession one day. He discussed his doubts and worries about the passages in Sacred Scripture which have just been quoted. The penance which he received from the confessor was that he should go and read and meditate in a certain city suburb. This area was full of cabins and caves where large numbers of poor, abandoned people were eeking out an existence. He drove there in his large streamlined car. He stopped and began reading slowly. After a while he became greatly affected and wept . . . He left his car and, as if driven by some irresistible force, began to distribute all the money which he had with him to those poor people. At last he understood fully, and without the need of any glossary, the command of Our

Lord: *Give that which remains as alms; and behold, all things are clean to you.*⁶ From that day he was no longer a self-complacent Christian, but a just and charitable rich man.

We can all learn a lot from this story. Even if we are not rich, we certainly have a little more than we need. Let us give it to the poor. They are the suffering members of the Mystical Body of Christ. We shall never be worthy members of this Mystical Body if we do not see the image of Jesus Christ in His poor.

¹ Luke 6, 24.

² Mt. 19, 23-24.

Cf. Mark 10, 24-25, Luke 18, 24-25.

³ James 5, 1-5.

⁴ Mark 10, 24.

⁵ Contr. G., III, 134.

⁶ Luke 11, 41.

28th January

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

I. If we want God to show mercy to us, we must be merciful to those who are in material or spiritual distress.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*¹

Let us recall the Gospel parable about the king who was making out the accounts of all his servants. One man was brought before him who owed him the enormous sum of ten thousand talents. He had no means of paying the debt. In order to obtain at least some compensation, the king ordered that this servant should be sold, together with his wife and children. But the servant wept and implored, so that the king was moved with pity and pardoned him completely. When the servant had left the king's presence, he met a fellow servant who owed him a small sum, namely, one hundred pieces of silver. He threw himself angrily upon him and caught him by the throat, demanding that he should pay the debt immediately. The unfortunate fellow began begging for mercy with tears in his eyes, but it was no use. He was flung into prison and condemned to forced

labour until such time as the debt would be paid. Soon afterwards the king came to hear of this incident. He was furious with the cruel servant and ordered him to be put in prison and severely punished.²

This parable refers to all of us. What debts we have contracted before God! Nevertheless, He is prepared to forgive us everything, provided that we are also merciful towards our fellowmen. This should be a comforting assurance.

2. Some day each one of us will stand before the judgment seat of God and will have to render an account of all his actions. Are we anxious that God will be merciful to us at that crucial moment? Let us be forgiving and charitable towards others now. It is clear from the words of the Gospel that we shall be pardoned or condemned largely in accordance with the measure of our mercifulness and charity. God will show mercy towards us as we show mercy towards others. In fact, the Eternal Judge will say to the good: *“Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for 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.”* Then He will turn to the wicked and deliver this terrible sentence. *“Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me . . . Amen I say to you, as long as you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me.”*³

These are terrifying words. They should persuade us to exercise charity towards all who are suffering in any way.

3. Works of mercy can be either corporal or spiritual. The former cannot be practised much by those who are poor, but

any generous-minded Christian can perform the latter. Sometimes there is greater charity in speaking a kind word than in giving a large alms. Often it is worth more in the sight of God to comfort a sorrowful heart or to revive in some soul a dying hope than it is to fill a hungry belly. There are so many spiritual miseries which are crying out to be assuaged. The suffering of the soul is much deeper than that of the body. This is why anything done to soothe and encourage the soul is so valuable before God. We can also do something about the remorse, disgust and darkness which are the result of the state of sin. If we can succeed in enlightening or healing one of these poor souls, we shall have accomplished a work of mercy which is most beautiful and meritorious in the eyes of God.

¹ Mt. 5, 7.² Mt. 18, 23-25.³ Mt. 25, 34-46.

29th January

BLESSED ARE THE CLEAN OF HEART

I. Understood in its entirety as embracing its higher grade, that is, perpetual virginity consecrated to God, purity of heart is a gift which only Christianity can give.¹ If we have been called to receive this wonderful gift, let us humbly thank God. It is a sublime dignity to belong, body and soul, to God.

Sacred Scripture says of men: *What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him? You have made him a 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.*² But under a certain aspect those who are living in virginity can be said to be superior to the angels. Since an angel has no body, he offers God only the homage of his spirit. A virgin, on the other hand, must bear the burden of an earthly body. He must offer continually

on the altar of his heart (and often after a heroic battle) not only his soul with its appetites and will, but also all the impulses and lower faculties *which war against the soul*.³

This is a double sacrifice, which St. Ambrose calls a continual martyrdom of body and soul. But the reward lies in the joy and peace which flow from this perpetual offering of soul and body to the Immaculate Lamb. This happiness is a compensation for any conflict which must be endured, and is a foretaste of the joys of Heaven.

2. There is a purity of heart and chastity which is an obligation for everybody, even for those who are married or preparing for marriage. Everybody is obliged to avoid any act of impurity in so far as it is opposed to his own particular state, to the natural law and to the divine law. Do not think that this degree of chastity is any easier than the first. Sometimes the obligations it imposes are even more difficult than those of absolute virginity.

There is only one remedy for impurity. It is the practise of virtue to the point of sacrifice. Only a man who is ready with the help of God to make any sacrifice can preserve purity of heart. It is a hard struggle, but only those who win can see God. Our Lord has said: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God*.⁴ Only the clean of heart will be able to see and enjoy Him for ever in Heaven and by means of His grace will be able to see Him in a less perfect manner on earth. St. Thomas says that mental blindness is the main effect of impurity.⁵ This is because anyone who gives himself up to impurity loses all spiritual enlightenment and easily loses his faith as well. He no longer sees God, and he does not believe any more, because his heart is steeped in the mire of impurity. *The sensual man does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand . . .*⁶ He is like the blind mole which creates its own dark little underground world and cannot see the sky any more. .

3. St. Paul warns us in the following words: *Do you not know*

*that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear him in your body.*⁷

We who are temples of the Holy Ghost, redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus, must keep unsullied the purity of our hearts, the lily of our innocence. We must do this no matter what sacrifices it may cost us. Those stern words from the Gospel, *if thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee*,⁸ refer in a special way to the obstacles we must overcome and the sacrifices we must make to preserve this beautiful virtue. There can be no half-measures. We must be prepared to go to any length, even to accept death if necessary, like St. Maria Goretti. Even as we should be ready to face martyrdom for the faith, so we must be ready to face martyrdom in order to preserve purity of soul.

¹ Cf. Enc. "Sacra Virginitas" (A. A.S., 1954, h. 161s).

² Ps. 8, 5; Heb. 2, 7.

³ I Peter 2, 11.

⁴ Mt. 5, 8.

⁵ S.Th. II-II, q. 53, a. 6.

⁶ I Cor. 2, 14.

⁷ I Cor. 6, 19-20.

⁸ Mt. 5, 29.

30th January

HOW TO GUARD HOLY PURITY

I. Purity of heart is a quality which attracts everybody, even those who are evil themselves. It makes a man seem like an angel in human form, for it shines from his countenance. Unfortunately, the virtue of purity is as difficult as it is beautiful. It is fatal for anyone to cast himself into the mire. The first sin of impurity is a disaster, because it is often the first link in a tragic chain which makes him the slave of his lower impulses and of the tyrannical enemy of souls, the devil.

We must resist the earliest suggestions of the flesh by every means in our power, both natural and supernatural.

St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that none of the passions dethrones reason so much as sensuality.¹ St. Augustine warns us also in his Confessions that lust has its cause in a perverse will and if anybody surrenders to it he acquires the evil habit. If this habit is not resisted, the sin becomes a frightening necessity. Resist from the beginning if you wish to avoid ruin and the slavery of the devil, who cunningly uses this passion to capture souls. If a man is overcome by violent temptation and falls into sin, however, he should not lose courage. God is infinitely good and merciful. He knows our weakness. When anyone falls, let him rise immediately. Let him return to God by repenting and making a good confession. Let him resolve to make any sacrifice rather than fall again.

2. Because it is so difficult to preserve the angelic purity of the soul, it is absolutely essential to make good use of the measures favoured for this purpose by the masters of the spiritual life. The first of these is prayer; the spirit of prayer will keep us close to God. If our mind and heart are united to God in the performance of every action, we will never allow ourselves to be separated from Him by impurity. This spirit of prayer must be based on humility and the consciousness of our continual need of God, and must be kept alive by love for Him.

The second measure is to avoid the occasions of sin. "Sensuality is best conquered by flight."² St. Thomas advises us. "He who loves danger will perish in it."³ Battles like this, said St. Francis de Sales, are won by the soldiers who retreat. As soon as an impure thought or image intrudes itself, drive it away as if a serpent were attacking you. It is fatal to allow the thought or image to gain ground, for at this stage victory becomes extremely difficult.

Thirdly, it often helps to occupy the mind and imagination immediately with things in which we are interested. The

greatest danger of all in these moments of temptation is idleness.

3. Let us examine our conscience now and we shall perceive that every time we have fallen in any way it was always because we did not put into practice the remedies suggested. So let us not lose courage but renew our determination to employ at the first sign of danger the necessary means of defending our purity. It will be a hard struggle at times. But the grace of God will never let us down as long as we do our best to co-operate with it. Each one of us should remember that *God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.*⁴ Our first reward will be the exhilaration of having fought hard and won.

¹ S. Th. II-II, q. 53, a. 6.

² S. Th., I-II, q. 35.

³ Ecclus. 3, 25.

⁴ I Cor. 10, 13.

31st January

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO LOVE PEACE

1. *Blessed are the peacemakers, Our Lord says, for they shall be called children of God.*¹

All those who are in the state of grace, and therefore living on the supernatural plane, are the adopted sons of God and sharers in His divine nature,² which they will enjoy one day in the Beatific Vision. Our Saviour, however, refers to those who love peace as being in a special way the sons of God. Why is this? St. Augustine offers the real explanation.³ God is perfect peace and harmony. In Him there is no conflict. His being and His activity are identical. He is perfect unity and simplicity, eternal and unaffected by the limitations of space and time. Now, the son should be a living image of the father. Those who reflect, although necessarily in a limited way, this peace, harmony and serene activity in their own personality, deserve to be called

in a special way the sons of God. They are the true lovers of peace.

2. How can one achieve this calmness of approach and manner of behaviour? We can consult St. Augustine again.⁴ It is particularly necessary that the faculties and movements of our lower nature should be under control and subjects to right reason. It is reason which should govern us. It should guide us constantly and exercise complete control over all those parts of our nature which are common to men and animals. It is disastrous if the desires of the flesh rebel against the spirit, and worse still if they gain the upper hand. Then there can be no more peace of heart. There is no longer that reflection of the divine harmony which the grace of God had bestowed on us. There is only slavery, the slavery which takes away liberty and peace. It is very necessary, therefore, that "that part of man which is the highest and most perfect should rule without opposition the remaining parts which are common to men and animals; but in its turn this supreme faculty, that is, the intellect or reason, should be subject to God Almighty."⁵

It is clear from these words that peace in us is the result of two kinds of necessary obedience, the obedience to right reason of the lower faculties, and the obedience of right reason to God, our Creator.

"This is the peace which God gives on earth to men of good will; this is the most perfect wisdom."⁶

3. Peace is especially opposed to sentiments of anger and hatred against our brothers. It commands us to love and help them. Hatred is the heritage of Cain, because God says that *he who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*⁷ A man who hates his brother may not actually kill him, but he is guilty of murdering him in his heart. As a result he loses peace of soul, because, as St. Augustine points out,⁸ by hating somebody you create disorder in yourself and destroy that divine harmony which was the gift of divine grace and charity.

If we wish to preserve interior peace, we must cast out from our hearts every vestige of hatred for our neighbour and entertain love, understanding and forgiveness for all. By loving our enemies we place ourselves above them by an act of true Christian nobility. We imitate Jesus, Who forgave His executioners and prayed for them from the Cross. A fit of anger is like a moment of madness. It is a great misfortune for anyone to yield to it. He speaks and acts like a man who has lost his reason and allows himself to be carried away by blind passion. When the moment of insanity is over, he will be ashamed of himself and of all that he has said and done.

It is necessary to be masters of ourselves and of our feelings. Never speak or act until anger has subsided within you. By persevering in co-operation with the grace of God, preserve that inward calmness which is a reflection of the peace of God.

¹ Mt. 5, 9.² Cf. 2 Peter 1, 4.³ Cf. De Serm. Domini, lib. I, Cap. 2.⁴ Ibid.⁵ Ibid.⁶ Ibid.⁷ I John 3, 15.⁸ Serm. 82.

FEBRUARY

1st February

TRUE PEACE

1. Everybody desires peace, but very few people really possess it. A good many profound and beautiful definitions have been attempted. Cicero called it "*tranquilla libertas*,"¹ which one might translate as "undisturbed freedom". His general idea was that there can be no peace without liberty. St. Augustine defined it as "*hominum ordinata concordia*"² or "ordered agreement among men". St. Thomas followed on the same lines when he said that peace was "*tranquillitas ordinis*"³ or "tranquillity of order." There are three necessary elements in peace. They are order, harmony, and liberty. Right order is the most important. Everything in us must be in its proper place. As we have shown in the preceding meditation, our lower faculties must be entirely subordinate to right reason, and this must be completely subject to the law of God.

Every act of rebellion against this proper order creates confusion in our nature and makes peace impossible. Furthermore, there must be harmony and agreement. This means that our minds must voluntarily accept and embrace this just order, and not merely endure it with reluctance. As St. Thomas says, peace is an act of charity; it comes indirectly from justice and directly from charity.⁴ We have perfect peace when this just order holds sway within us, provided that we are not enduring it as if it were a yoke, but lovingly accepting it under the inspiration of divine charity. This is that genuine peace which

gives us the liberty of the sons of God, that freedom from evil with which Christ has set us free.⁵ True peace flourishes in an atmosphere of goodness and perishes when it encounters evil. Whether it is in the field of social relations or in the spiritual life, peace without liberty is not peace at all, but slavery and death.

2. When He came into the world, Jesus proclaimed peace. The Angels hovering over His humble manger sang songs of glory to God on high and of peace to men of good will on earth. During His earthly pilgrimage He often spoke of peace. When He forgave sinners their faults, He said to each of them: *Go in peace, and sin no more.*⁶ When He was leaving this earth He bequeathed His peace to His Apostles as if it were a sacred heirloom: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.*⁷ We can see from these words that the peace of Jesus is not the same as worldly peace. The Church in its liturgy implores from God that peace which the world cannot give. When the world speaks of peace, it means normally the external, public peace which flows from respect for the law and for the established regime. This is peace; there is no doubt about that. It is necessary and is a gift from God. But it is not enough. We need the inner peace of soul of which we have already spoken, for it is the only true and solid foundation for external peace. Without this peace of soul, external peace is uncertain and fleeting. We have said that true peace is based on three things: Right order, harmony, and liberty. But in order to obtain full and perfect peace still one more thing is necessary; complete and loving abandonment to the will of God. The beginning of real peace and holiness lies in doing the will of God in every detail. The perfection of peace and holiness is to do the will of God in everything purely from love for Him. Dante expresses this profound idea when he describes the peace of the blessed in Heaven, now unshakeable in their joyful compliance with the divine will.

“E la sua volontate é nostra pace:
Ella é quel mare, al qual tutto si move
ciò ch’ ella crea e che natura face.”⁸

“His will is our repose:
He is the ocean into which everything flows
Which He has created in the universe.”

3. This absolute and loving abandonment to the will of God in all things brings complete inner peace, but it does not exclude conflict. Interior peace is the result of the practice of virtue and therefore of the struggle against evil. When Our Lord had repeated several times that He had given us His peace, He said also: *Do not think that I have come to send peace upon the earth; I have come to bring a sword, not peace.*⁹ These apparently contradictory words of Our Lord are explained by the fact that the peace of Jesus does not consist in inactivity, but demands action and strife and the conquest of evil. It is a militant peace which Our Lord desires us to possess. Only when we have controlled our passions, when we have made our wills entirely subject to the will of God and have renounced ourselves so that the justice and charity of Jesus Christ can triumph in us, only then shall we reach those serene heights where storms from below cannot come near us and the peace of God reigns supreme.

We find examples of this true and perfect peace among the Saints, Martyrs and Apostles. We read of the Apostles that *they departed . . . rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*¹⁰ This is an example of that genuine peace which is the result of victory in the combat against evil and of complete and loving submission to the will of God.

¹ Phil. 2, 44.

² De Civ. Dei, XIX, 13.

³ S. Th. II-II, q. 29, a. 1 ad 1.

⁴ S. Th. II-II, q. 29; a. 1 ad 3.

⁵ Cf. Gal. 4, 31; 2 Cor. 3, 17.

⁶ Luke 7, 50; 8, 48; John 8, 11.

⁷ John 14, 27.

⁸ Par., III, 85-87.

⁹ Mt. 10, 34.

¹⁰ Acts 5, 41.

2nd February

THE PURIFICATION OF OUR LADY

1. To-day the church commemorates the presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple and the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These ceremonies were carried out in order to comply with a twofold Mosaic law. One part of this law referred to women who had become mothers; the other part was concerned with first-born male children. According to the first law a mother was officially regarded as impure for forty days after she had given birth to a child. When this period was over she had to present herself in the temple and make an offering of a lamb and a turtledove. If she were poor, she could substitute a second young pigeon for the lamb.¹ The second law² commanded the mother to offer and consecrate to God her first-born son. She was to do this in memory of the miracle in Egypt when the Angel of God destroyed all the first born sons of the people of the country and spared those of the Israelites. In later times when the ritual worship of God became the special obligation of the tribe of Levi, the first-born sons of the other tribes had to be presented in the temple and bought back by an offering.

It is quite clear that Jesus and Mary were not bound by this twofold law. But they voluntarily subjected themselves to it in order to give an example of humility and obedience.

2. When we meditate on the subject of this feast, we find two outstanding examples to be imitated. The first is given by Mary. She was perfectly pure and holy, conceived without original sin and full of grace. She knew well that she had conceived her Divine Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. So she was not obliged to observe this humiliating law of purification. Nevertheless, she fulfilled it and gave God the offering of the poor as a lesson for us in humility and poverty. It is so easy for us

to excuse ourselves from obeying the law and to make a display of our special privileges before others. Let us learn from Mary to love silent submission and detachment from worldly wealth and honours.

The other example is given us by Jesus. Being God, there was no need for Him to be bought back in the same way as the first-born sons of the Israelites. He was the Saviour Who had come to redeem the human race from sin and make them heirs to the kingdom of Heaven. But He said of Himself: *I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*³ A few days earlier He had submitted to the painful and humiliating rite of circumcision. Now He allows Himself to be offered in the temple as a victim of expiation for all mankind. These are glorious examples, before which our pride should bow in shame. We should be moved to offer ourselves to God lovingly and without reserve.

3. In the Gospel narrative of St. Luke⁴ another character also appears. He intrudes upon the scene without any apparent right to be there, but he had been inspired by God. This is the old and saintly Simeon. He was not a priest. He was an upright man, careful in his observance of the law, who was waiting longingly for the coming of the promised Redeemer. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him and had revealed that he would not die until he had seen the Saviour. He was inspired to go to the Temple, where he saw Jesus. He took Him in his arms and was overcome by joy. Then he blessed God and declared that he was prepared to accept death now that he had been able to see and embrace the Saviour as God had promised. *Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace.*⁵ It was a beautiful way to meet death, to be able to hold Jesus close to his heart and see his long life of hope and expectation rewarded by the loving embrace of his Lord. Let us try and live like Simeon, with our minds and hearts turned towards Jesus. Let us think chiefly of Him, love Him above everything else, and work only for Him. Then our death will be as beautiful as His. In fact,

we shall have been even more fortunate, for we can go further than receiving Jesus into our arms. We shall be able to receive Him into our hearts. He will be at hand to give us the supernatural strength which we shall need on our great journey into eternity.

¹ Cf. Lev. 12.

² Cf. Es. 13, 2 ; 34, 19 ; Num. 8, 16 ; Lev. 27, 26.

³ Mt. 5, 17.

⁴ Cf. Luke 2, 22-31.

⁵ Luke 2, 29.

3rd February

WORK

1. God created man master of the world. He commanded him to populate it and to rule it.¹ He placed him in an earthly paradise, *to till it and to keep it.*²

As long as man remained in the state of innocence, however, work was a pleasure. It gave him the joy of collaborating with God in the work of creation. Today work is still a pleasure. By working we co-operate with God, because it was His intention that the resources of the earth should be exploited by human industry and intelligence and should benefit both the individual and society. Work is a noble occupation, because it involves co-operation with God's work of creation and conservation. If anybody tries to deprive it of its lofty human character and to reduce it to the level of mere toil, regarding it as nothing more than an instrument of production or a handy system of exchange, he is debasing the worker and robbing him of all spiritual incentive.

2. Since the fall of Adam, work is not only a pleasure, but a burden and an atonement as well. It is deceitful to hold out the promise of a paradise of workers, a possibility in which no intelligent person could be expected to believe. The so-called social plan for workers, designed to create a paradise upon earth,

produces only a system of regimentation in which men cease to be free and become insignificant parts of the all-powerful state mechanism. We must oppose this degradingly materialistic conception of labour. Work is a command of God Who, after the sin of Adam, told him and his sons: *In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.*³

Let us accept from God this high responsibility of co-operating with Him in His work of creation and redemption. Let us accept it alike when it is a pleasure and when it is a sacrifice. Let us accept it with the cheerfulness of the Saints, or at least with resignation. Let us realise that by working we purify our souls and atone for our sins. We also make ourselves useful to our brothers on earth, because the work of our hands and of our minds exercises a social function, especially on behalf of the abandoned classes. It is an apostolate of expiation and redemption for large numbers of souls who are sunk in ignorance and sin.

3. Work is both a right and a duty. It is a right because God created the wealth of the earth for all men. All men, therefore, have the right to exploit these resources and to receive the reward of their labour. If anyone denies or obstructs this fundamental right to work, he is opposing God and committing a grave injustice against his fellowmen and against society. If society does not provide work for all its citizens, it becomes an unjust organisation capable of bringing into being all types of disorder. If anyone has the opportunity of providing employment and does not do so, he is sinning. If anyone has great wealth and stores it away uselessly, enjoying it himself in pleasant idleness, not only does he sin, but he can sin very seriously. They are guilty of grave sin also who through selfishness do not pay a just wage to their employees, or who through greed for profit create an unchristian and inhuman social gulf between employees and their employers. Meditate seriously on these sacrosanct principles, which have their basis in the Gospel.

Work is also a duty. Everybody must work, either manually

or intellectually. So God decreed to Adam in the garden of Eden. St. Paul says very clearly: *If any man will not work, neither let him eat.*⁴

It is wonderful to see how anxious Jesus was to sanctify labour, first of all as a humble workman for thirty years, then as Teacher and Redeemer for the last three years of His life. This is a magnificent example for manual and intellectual workers alike. It is an example which the Saints followed until they had exhausted all their strength.

¹ Cf. Gen. 1, 28.

² Gen. 2, 15.

³ Gen. 3, 19.

⁴ 2 Thess. 3, 10.

4th February

WORK AND SANCTITY

I. A man who does not work cannot be a saint. But it is not enough to work alone, just as it is not enough to pray alone, in order to become holy. Either on its own is too little. Perfection consists in praying and working. This is how Jesus spent His Life. The Apostolic Constitution "Sponsa Christi" urges even the contemplative Orders to devote themselves to work. It assures them that work will prove no obstacle to their growth in perfection, but will be "a powerful and consistent exercising of all the virtues and the pledge of an effective combination of the contemplative and active life after the example of the Holy Family at Nazareth."¹ We must sanctify our work with prayer. The Benedictines have practised throughout the centuries their celebrated motto *Ora et labora*, "Pray and work." By means of it they transformed the world during the darkest centuries of the Church. They converted impenetrable forests into fertile plains. They set up centres of work and study which later became flourishing cities. They appeased the barbarians who

were threatening to destroy civilisation. They built monasteries and cathedrals. Above all, they preached the Gospel to the people and bound them together in the brotherhood of Christian charity. This is an illustration of what can be accomplished by work united with prayer. It produces holiness in the individual and through him in human society.

2. Everything we do, whether we are working with our hands or with our minds, can and should be made holy by offering it to God. The peasant who toils in the heat of the sun or in the hardship of winter to wring a living from the hard soil, the workman who strikes the anvil with his hammer, or who extracts coal from the bowels of the earth or who controls some complicated piece of machinery in order to produce the press, electricity, or other services for men; all these can and should raise their minds frequently in adoration and thanksgiving to God, the Creator and Giver of every good. In the same way those who are engaged in intellectual work, dedicated to the study of the different branches of knowledge, human and divine, should remember that light comes from Heaven, not from the earth. They should, therefore, ask in their prayers for God's help. Science without God is cold and soul-less. It can do more harm than good. It fills the soul with pride and dries up the heart. It can lead, as experience has shown us, to the destruction instead of the well-being of the human race. Students and scientists must be investigators of the mysteries of God as well as those of the universe. Only in God will they find an answer to the problems of the spirit.

There are some who work both with their minds and hearts. These include priests, teachers, doctors, good sisters sacrificing their lives in the hospitals, the mothers of families, and many others. Their work will be especially fruitful if it is united in a spirit of faith and charity with their prayers.

3. Everybody imagines that there are innumerable problems in the world to be solved. As a matter of fact, there are, but

they can all be reduced to one in the end, the problem of sanctity. If we were all saints, or at any rate sincerely trying to put into practice the maxims of the Gospel, all the other questions would be answered. For a Christian, work should mean the employment of his bodily and spiritual energies for the glory of God, for his own benefit and for the common good. He can work to earn his daily bread, for personal satisfaction, for the advancement of science, art or society. These are all good motives. But the Christian must also have a higher motive. Even as he is living for eternity, so must he work for eternity. He must realise that God will admit us to Heaven if we have worked for love of Him and in union with Him. Like everything else in our lives, work must be raised to a supernatural level. We must work patiently because it is our duty and the will of God. In this way we shall make use of the talents which God has given us, not only for our own benefit but also as a means of helping so many of our fellowmen who are dependent on us. Then work will be something else besides an expenditure of energy and an atonement for our sins. It will be a pleasure, because we shall know that God is counting every moment of sacrifice which we are willingly enduring for His sake.

¹ A.A.S., 1951, p. 13.

5th February

IDLENESS

We are entitled to set aside time for lawful repose and for meditation or prayer. But real idleness is always a sin. It can easily be the cause of graver faults and of our spiritual ruin. God gave us material and spiritual powers as our talents, which we must employ for profit and not bury uselessly in the earth. The servant who received five talents from God and increased

the sum by another five was rewarded by the praise of his Lord and admission into the kingdom of Heaven. He dealt in a similar manner with the other servant who had received two talents and doubled them by his industry. But the lazy servant, who buried the talent he had received and met his master with empty hands, was condemned and flung into the darkness of Hell.¹ This is a frightening lesson which the Gospel teaches us. It should make us think about the fact that one day we shall have to render an account to God of all the gifts which He has bestowed on us. Has He given us a great deal? If so, we shall have to account for it all. Has He given us only a small amount? Even so, we shall have to account for every bit of it. Consider the immense responsibility which becomes ours along with the gifts of God. Let us resolve to employ these to the best of our ability, so that when we appear before Him our hands will not be empty, but filled with gains.

2. Idleness is forbidden by God because work is His commandment. He had already told Adam and his successors: *In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.*²

St. Paul warns us: *If any man will not work, neither let him eat.*³ This is a universal law which embraces people of all classes and circumstances. God commands everyone to work. Therefore, anybody who disobeys this law without reason sins against God. Those who lead leisurely, inactive lives should meditate seriously on this law of God. The fact that they possess large fortunes does not excuse them from this divine law. They must engage in some work, either mental or manual. It may be for themselves, or it may be for their needy brothers who live in want or in illness and cannot fend for themselves. We are all brothers in Jesus. It is not right that one brother should live in poverty and wretchedness, while another idly enjoys a life of plenty and of pleasure.

3. There is another weighty reason which should prevent us from living in idleness. The Holy Spirit warns us that: *Idleness*

*is an apt teacher of mischief*⁴ and *he who follows idle pursuits is a fool*.⁵ In other words, sloth is a great stupidity and is the father of the vices. If anyone is inactive, he learns nothing. Since our bodily and spiritual faculties were made for action, it necessarily follows that when they are not working for a good or useful purpose, they find an outlet in other directions which lead to disorder and sin. Without work and prayer, there is only inactivity which leads to sin. It is fatal to remain idle. God warns us that we must render an account of every idle word.⁶ St. Thomas notes that an idle word is usually a venial sin, but can also be a mortal sin.⁷ What should be said, then, of those who live in idleness, while there is so much work to be done for the glory of God, for our own good, and for the good of others? Anyone who loves God is never idle, says St. Jerome. The love of God works wonderful things; if it does not, it cannot be called love.

¹ Cf. Mt. 25, 15-30.

² Gen. 3, 19.

³ 2 Thess. 3, 10.

⁴ Eccus. 33, 29.

⁵ Prov. 12, 11.

⁶ Mt. 12, 36.

⁷ S. Th., II-II, q. 72, a. 5.

6th February

RELIGION AND DEVOTION

1. St. Thomas concisely expresses the nature of religion in these words: "The object of religion is to give honour to the One God because He is the first principle of creation and order in the universe."¹

We know that everything is the work of God. Everything depends on Him both for its being and for its continued existence. This is so from man down to the minutest insect, from the stars in the sky to the invisible atom. It is true that man and the other creatures also work. In fact, the universe is a gigantic workshop. But God is the one and only cause of man and of the

whole of nature. We are only instruments of the divine omnipotence. Now, justice demands that we give everyone his due. Everything belongs to God. Therefore, man ought to humble himself before God in an act of adoration and loving obedience. From the highest mountains to the depths of the valley, from the stars of the firmament to the tiny flowers of the fields, all creation unconsciously sings of the glory of God. In the same way man, a creature of intelligence and free will, should offer himself and all his faculties in an act of complete homage to his Creator and Lord. But there is more to it than that. God is not only our Creator and Lord, He is also our Redeemer. The eternal Word of God became man out of love for us. He gave us His teaching and commandments. He redeemed us with His precious blood and left us the Church as our mother and our infallible teacher of truth. So, if religion is to be complete, it will oblige us to be obedient to whatever God has revealed and to whatever the Church which He founded commands and teaches us.

2. Religion, however, should not be a cold, mechanical practice of obedience to the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church. Deep spiritual devotion and supernatural charity are necessary as well as religion. In other words, religion should not be merely external, but should spring from the mind and heart; this is devotion, which is the spirit of religion. "Devotion," writes Aquinas, "seems to be the determination to give one's self readily to the service of God."² But this determination should be loving and effective, because, as St. Thomas also observes, "charity generates devotion."³

St. Francis de Sales analysed and expanded these ideas. "True and living devotion," he writes, "presupposes the love of God; indeed, it really is a true love of God . . . but a love . . . which has reached that height of perfection at which it not only causes us to act, but to act zealously, frequently and promptly"⁴ . . . He continues: "Since devotion consists in an unique degree of

charity, it not only makes us prompt, active and zealous in the observance of all the divine commands, but incites us furthermore to perform readily and lovingly as many good works as we can . . . even if they are only recommended or suggested.”⁵ From this solid and sincere devotion flows that taste for divine things, that inner gentleness and peace of spirit which the Saints enjoyed even in the midst of sorrow and disillusionment.

3. We must not be satisfied simply to carry out the acts of religion, however exactly. We must fulfil them with love. It is the spontaneous homage of the mind and heart that God wants most of all. The body must also pay its tribute of subjection to its creator, but if the mind and heart are cold and distracted, this tribute is worthless. There is no religion without devotion. *This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*⁶ Consider this complaint of Our Lord. Let us earnestly examine our conduct. Religion is useless if it is not fed by the active fire of charity. Anyone who is content to go to Mass on feast-days and stand in the church silently and indifferently, like a candlestick without a candle, is not a true and sincere Christian. Religion must be deeply felt. It must be penetrated by devotion and charity. Only then will it inspire real Christian activity.

¹ S. Th., II-II, q. 81, a. 3.

² S. Th., II-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1.

³ S. Th., II-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2.

⁴ Filotea, Bk. I, C. 1.

⁵ Ibid. ⁶ Mt. 15, 8 ; Mark 7, 6.

7th February

RELIGION AND ACTION

1. Jesus says in the Gospel: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*¹ The world was lost in the darkness of error and in the entanglement of vice. Jesus came to point out the only path which leads to truth and to virtue. But He was not satisfied

merely to show the way and to preach the truth. There were philosophers who had spoken eloquently and taught wisely on the subject of truth and the virtues. Nobody, however, was able to give men the strength to follow their precepts. Many could have repeated the words of the poet: "*Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor;*"² "I see what it is better to do, but I do what is worse." Jesus, on the other hand, not only taught the way and the truth, but by His grace gave men a spark of the divine life which was in Him. The Christian religion is more than a system of doctrines to be firmly held. It is more than a system of private and public worship of God and veneration of His saints, more than a mere collection of rites to be observed. It should also be a way of life in full conformity with the moral precepts given by Jesus Christ. He is declared to be not only the way and the truth, but our very life, in the sense that He transfuses into us His own divine life by means of His grace, with which we must co-operate generously if we wish to be true Christians.

2. Anyone who fails to correspond with the grace of God is not living the life of Jesus. Without the life of Jesus he is a dead limb, a withered branch cut away from the vine. It is not enough to say "Lord, Lord!" in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven, but it is necessary to do the will of our Heavenly Father.³ The grace of God must produce an abundant harvest of good works, no matter what sacrifices this may cost us. Otherwise, God's gift would have been bestowed in vain and before the Supreme Judge one day would be a reason for a terrible retribution instead of a reward. Let us think seriously about this. Has the spirit of religion become reduced to an empty form of belief and ritual action, or are we really living what we believe? Meditate with attention on these words of St. James: *What will it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but does not have works? Can the faith save him? And if a brother or a sister be naked and in want of daily food, and one of you say to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled", yet you do not give them what is necessary*

*for the body, what does it profit? So faith too, unless it has works, is dead in itself.*⁴

Even the devil believes, but he is damned for ever.⁵ *Religion pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to give aid to orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted from this world.*⁶

3. If we wish to be true and sincere Christians it is not enough to believe, nor is it enough to attend the ceremonies of religion. We must act like true Christians. As St. Gregory the Great writes, "we shall really be faithful Christians only when we practise in our actions what we promise in our words."⁷ Since Christianity is above everything else the religion of charity, it is essential that we should be on fire with the love of God and of our neighbour. As St. Augustine says, faith without charity is the faith which the devil possesses.⁸

¹ John 14, 6.

² Ovid., *Metam.*, VII, 20, 21.

³ Cf. Mt. 7, 21.

⁴ James 2, 14-17.

⁵ Cf. James 2, 19.

⁶ James 1, 27.

⁷ Homil. 29.

⁸ *De Carit.*, 10.

8th February

DOING EVERYTHING FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

I. The beginning of perfection consists in doing the will of God even in our smallest actions. But to do everything for the love of God is the summit of Christian perfection. If we aimed always at doing God's will and acting from the motive of love for Him, we should be contented and at peace, because we should be holy. The saints are the only people who remain calm and undisturbed in the midst of worldly adversity. They are always content because they live in God. Their lives are in full conformity with His Will, guided by His love, and dedicated

to His service. As a result, they live in a kind of spiritual stratosphere far above the storms of this world. There they are above the clouds of pride, ambition, avarice and all the other major vices. There they see and contemplate everything in the light of God. Let us become saints. Then we shall have solved all the problems of life.

2. As St. John says, God is love; he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God dwells in him.¹ Since He is love, God longs to be loved by us. Our actions should come from, and be accompanied by, our love for Him. *Love therefore is the fulfilment of the Law,*² writes St. Paul. We must perform all our actions, therefore, for the love of God. The alchemists of old made a great many experiments in the hope of being able to transform base metals into gold. What was impossible in the physical order, however, is quite possible in the moral and spiritual order. We can transform all our actions into pure gold by means of the love of God. There is a story told about a sculptor who was chiselling out a small statue which was to be placed on the highest pinnacle of the temple. He was striving after perfection in the tiniest details, as if it would be possible for the statue to be inspected at close quarters. Somebody asked him why he was so particular and careful in his work, and he replied: "I am not working for those who are looking up from below, but for Him Who is looking down from above. I am working for God alone!"

3. In one of his letters Luther wrote that he was so busy that he had no time to read his Breviary nor to offer Holy Mass. There is no doubt that it was this estrangement from prayer and from the love of God which caused him to finish up as he did. Our work must be based on charity and the interior life, so that we may be always united with God. Otherwise, every action of ours, no matter how good it may appear, is sterile and valueless in the sight of God. Today also there are many people busily engaged in apostolic work, but they have

no interior life nourished by charity. This is what is known as the heresy of action. Everything we do is useless and even harmful if our external activity is not accompanied by a flourishing interior life enriched by divine grace. St. Gregory the Great paraphrases the words of the Gospel as follows: "Our Lord says: If anyone loves Me, let him keep my commandments. Love is proved by action. This is why St. John³ says that the man who claims to love God and does not keep His commandments is a liar. We love God sincerely if we keep His commandments and avoid the immoderate pleasures of our age. Anyone who surrenders without reserve to the unlawful desires of this world certainly does not love God, because he is acting contrary to His will."⁴

¹ 1 John 4, 16.² Rom. 13, 10.³ 1 John 2, 4.⁴ Homil. 30 in Ev.

9th February

THE USE OF CREATURES

1. God has created all things for Himself, as He is the most perfect being and the final end of all things. He has made man supreme in the world, however, and has made all other creatures subject to him.¹ This God-given supremacy over the universe continues even after the fall of Adam. It can no longer be exercised without trouble and suffering as it was in the state of innocence, however. Now it must be acquired by hard manual labour and by keen intellectual research and study.

After man's disobedience to God, even the relationship which existed between him and created things was disturbed. But these

things are still a ladder which leads to God if they are properly used. They are a distant reflection of His beauty and omnipotence. *The heavens, says the Psalmist, declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handwork.*²

Let us listen to the voice of creation, for it speaks to us of God. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus wept when she beheld the fragile beauty of a flower, and said "How great is God's love for us!" St. Francis of Assisi saw the image of the common Creator everywhere around him and called all these things, including fire and water, his brothers and sisters. He even conversed with them in a simple way. He looked upon death itself as the good sister who was to free him from the slavery of the body and unite him to God.

2. The Saints understood clearly what our attitude to creatures should be. Created things should be a reflection of eternal beauty which entices us to love God, the source and origin of all things. They should form a ladder which makes it easy for us to ascend towards God and to achieve unity with him. But is this what creatures really mean to us? Or do they, more often than not, lead us away from God? Perhaps we are held up too frequently by our love for creatures and tend to forget God. The passing loveliness of this earth causes us to forget the everlasting beauty for which we are destined. Worse still, the use of creatures may divert us from God altogether and cause us to disobey His law. Let us examine ourselves thoroughly on this point. Let us see if it is necessary to alter the direction of our thoughts and desires and to purify our hearts in such a way that we shall think, love and act for God alone.

3. St. Ignatius of Loyola investigates this subject in his Spiritual Exercises. He writes that we ought to use things in so far as they bring us nearer to our final end. We ought to avoid things completely, he continues, in so far as they separate or distract us from this end. The function of creatures in our regard is to lead us nearer to God, to remind us of God, and to make

us love God. But if they are a source of scandal to us, we must avoid them. The Gospel is very strict on this matter when it says: *If thy hand or foot is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off and cast it from thee.*³ This means that we must be ready to give up anything rather than endanger our souls and risk the loss of divine grace.

¹ Cf. Gen. 1, 28.² Ps. 18, 2.³ Mt. 5, 29-30; 18, 8.

10th February

THE LOVE OF GOD

1. God's law is founded on love. We read in the Gospel how the Pharisees asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment of the Law. Jesus replied: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*¹

If a man wants to know if he is living a good Christian life, therefore, all he has to do is ask himself if he loves God above everything and his neighbour as himself. If he lacks this love, he is not a true Christian; everything else is insignificant, if not useless. "Love God," says St. Augustine "and do what you will." Why so? Because if anyone loves God sincerely, he does not offend Him. Moreover, he serves Him diligently and promotes His honour and glory by every means in his power. Nor does he find it very difficult to do this. Love gives wings to his feet and pours enthusiasm and fervour into his heart. "He who loves does not feel tired," says St. Augustine. "Where there is love"

adds St. Bernard, "there is no weariness, but a gentle pleasure instead."

2. If we really know God, we should love Him above all created things. I have loved You too little, My God, said St. Augustine in his Confessions, because I have not known You well enough. If we knew God, we should recognise that He is infinite beauty, goodness and wisdom. We should realise that the beauty of creatures is like a passing cloud, for it is a vague and distant reflection of the eternal beauty of God. We should realise that the wisdom of men is only a ray of God's light which comes from Him and must return to Him. Finally we should perceive that men are good only in so far as they do their best to respond to the inspirations of grace which God has placed in their hearts. God alone is in Himself and of Himself supremely true, beautiful, good, wise and holy. Created things are only an invitation to love God, their Creator. God alone, therefore, is supremely lovable in Himself. In the apt words of St. Bernard, "God Himself is the reason why we should love God; and the measure of our love should be measureless." Let us not allow ourselves to become entangled in the empty passing things of this world, but let us raise our minds and hearts to God.

3. We must love God not only as our Creator and Lord, but also as our Redeemer and Saviour. God's goodness in having created us is immense. Being infinite, He had no need of us. He created us in order to give us a participation in His infinite power, wisdom and beauty. The goodness of God in having become man and shed His blood for our salvation, however, is such a tremendous mystery that only the infinite love of God for us could provide any kind of an explanation. But this infinite love demands equal love on our part. Obviously it, cannot be equal, since we are poor, limited creatures. So we should love God, as the Gospel says, above all things and with the whole strength of our souls. "*We have come to know, and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf,*"² says St.

John. We must believe firmly and effectually to the point of charity. Charity works miracles. It has worked miracles in the Saints. It will do the same for us in our spiritual life and in our external apostolic work. There is only one thing necessary, and that is for us to have this ardent charity, which is the bond of perfection.³

¹ Mt. 22, 37-40.

² 1 John 4, 16.

³ Col. 3, 14.

11th February

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

1. The Gospel not only commands us to love God above all things, but also to love our neighbour as ourselves.¹ The Christian love of our neighbour flows necessarily from the love of God. Our Creator loves all men as His own sons. Therefore we ought to love one another as brothers, even as Our Lord loves us. We should see in our neighbour, especially if he is in need, the person of Christ Himself, our eldest brother, *the first-born among many brethren.*²

If men sincerely loved one another, not merely as brothers, but as much as they love themselves, what problems would be solved! Who can say how many evils would be abated and how many sorrows would be assuaged? To transform the world it would be enough to put into practice the first great commandment of the Gospel, which is the commandment of charity. Admittedly, the world would not become an earthly paradise, for any such Utopia is an impossibility. But it would become a dignified dwellingplace of brothers loving and helping one another. *Love is the fulfilment of the Law,*³ St. Paul very truly says. *Have charity, which is the bond of perfection.*⁴

2. But who really loves his neighbour as if he were himself?

Only the Saints. Jesus loved us not only as much as He loved Himself, but much more than this, because He gave His life and His own precious blood for our salvation. The Saints, who lived the life of Christ and followed His example, saw Jesus in all their fellowmen. Therefore they loved them as themselves and even more than themselves. One could cite thousands of instances of heroic charity in the lives of the Saints. The example of St. Paul will suffice, however. He said that his life was so much the life of Christ that it was not he himself who was living any longer, but Christ in him. But he also claimed to be continually driven forward by charity, so far as to desire even separation from Christ if that would save or help his brothers.⁵ Do we possess this sincere and active love of our neighbour? Let us examine ourselves in this regard. Let us remember that if we are lacking in this charity towards our brothers in Jesus, we are not genuine Christians.

3. A few hundred yards from the centre of a big city one often finds groups of hovels in which large numbers of families are living, herded together in poverty. There in the winter time these poor people suffer from the cold and damp. Often their homes are badly roofed and they have not even a loaf of bread to kill the pangs of hunger. Not very far away there are luxurious mansions and expensive villas . . . and up and down the streets drift splendidly upholstered cars, carrying men and women for whom the only thing in life that matters is pleasure.

“Love your neighbour as yourself,” the Gospel says. How far we still are from the realisation of this command. Men would need to go to these poor hovels to do the Spiritual Exercises. They would need to live in these places for at least a month. Many ideas would be changed and many hearts transformed if this were done. The slums, cabins, caves, and other hovels in which men have to live, bear sad testimony to the fact that the Gospel has not yet been understood by many, and that Christian charity has still a long way to go. Consider before God if you are

responsible, even in some small way, for this wretched state of affairs. Form the resolution of contributing as far as possible to the relief of so much want and suffering.

¹ Cf. Mt. 13, 35-40

² Rom. 8, 29.

³ Rom. 13, 10..

⁴ Col. 3, 14.

⁵ Rom. 9, 3.

12th February

SELF-LOVE

1. By self-love we mean here an inordinate love of self. We are not forbidden to love ourselves. In fact, this is something natural to us and therefore intended by God. We should love ourselves, however, in a properly ordered manner. In the first place, we must love God above everything and therefore more than ourselves. God is our creator, and our Redeemer and our final end. Everything comes to us from Him, and for this reason everything must return to Him. We should not be self-centred, but God-centred. In other words, we must direct all our actions towards God, not towards ourselves. We cannot set our own ego in the place which belongs to God, still less above Him. To do so would be equivalent to robbing God, because everything is His and we ourselves belong to Him. If we have any intelligence at all, let us remember that God gave it to us. If we have sound health, strength or good looks, let us remember that these are His gifts. If we have amassed a great store of cultural or artistic learning as a result of our own ability and study, let us not become too attached to it nor look for praise and admiration. It is God Who gave us this ability and the energy and enthusiasm to cultivate it. Honour and glory are due to God alone.

2. "Self-love dies three days after ourselves," St. Francis de Sales was accustomed to remark. What he meant was that it is very difficult to think and act only for God, without our own ego raising its head and stealing some of His glory. It is hard to

be humble in the presence of God. But it is harder still to be humble before men. When anybody genuflects in front of the altar and begins to pray in the presence of God, it is not too difficult for him to bow his head and recognise his own weakness and dependence. But it is different among other men. In the presence of men we are easily tempted to display ourselves and our endowments. We feel displeased when we are not noticed nor praised. Let us steer clear of the esteem of men. Humility is the foundation of every virtue. If we are not humble, we can never become holy.

3. There are three tiny blossoms which can scarcely be seen—those of the corn, the olive, and the vine. Nevertheless, from these we receive grain, oil and wine—three very precious commodities. These three little blossoms are almost invisible in comparison with other larger flowers, such as that of the magnolia, which do not yield any useful fruit. They should present us with a starting-point for meditation. Would we like our actions to be valuable in the sight of God and bring forth good fruit? Let us be humble and suppress love of self. Then God will look on us with favour. He will give us His grace and make fertile the work which we do purely for Him. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*¹

¹James 4, 6.

13th February

THE CAUSES OF DISCONTENT

1. It is hard to find anyone in this world who is really content. Some grumble about poor health, others about not having enough to live on, others about an unsuccessful career. Some complain about the lack of sympathy and the ingratitude of men; others about constant temptation, spiritual dryness and the discouragement of frequently falling into sin. Still others are

confined to a bed of pain for weeks, months or even years at a time. There are some, too, who must endure mental suffering which is greater than any physical pain. Perhaps they have lost a loved one who was the centre of their own life upon earth, or perhaps they are suffering from a loss of reputation, the result of some calumny or of some moment of weakness on their own part. In short, this world can be compared, to quote St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, to an unsatisfactory hotel in which we must spend the night while we are waiting for the breaking of an eternal day in which we shall be able to see God. He is fortunate who knows how to live contentedly or at least resignedly in this poor boarding-house until the dawn of that better life which is the only object of our earthly journey.

2. There are a few people in the world however, who are always content. They walk lightly upon the earth, for their minds are already with God in Heaven and their hearts are united to Him. Have they any anxieties or disappointments? They have, and they feel them deeply. But sorrow can make them bow their heads only for a moment, and then they raise them cheerfully again. They understand that they are suffering for God, even as they live and work only for Him. Therefore their reaction to every sorrow or humiliation is always the same: *Deo Gratias!* If God wants it this way, I must be satisfied, too. May His holy will be done in all things. These people are the Saints who are never lacking in the Church. The Apostles rejoiced in the insults and ill-treatment they received from the Sanhedrin. *They departed from the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*¹ Do we desire to possess also the only kind of contentment it is possible to have on earth? Let us do our best to become holy. That is the only way open to us.

3. There is only one reason for our dissatisfaction. It is given by St. Augustine, profound observer that he was of the human heart. "You have made us for Yourself alone, O God, and our

hearts will always be uneasy until they rest in You.”² If anyone rushes in all directions looking for happiness, he will never find it. The created things of this world cannot satisfy our hearts, which are on a far higher plane than they are. Worse still, a man may look for happiness in pleasure or in sin, but he will find only bitterness and disgust. Let us look to God alone. If we do everything for Him, a gleam of eternal happiness will brighten up our earthly pilgrimage.

¹ Acts 5, 41.

² Confessions, I, 1, 1.

14th February

THE EARLY HOURS OF THE DAY

1. Waking up in the morning is like being raised to life again. Sleep, which is necessary for the restoration of energy, is an image of death. During those hours of sleep it was as if you did not exist any longer. Your mind was unconscious, your limbs inactive. Now God gives you life once more and the strength to live it. Your first thoughts, therefore, should be directed towards Him. When the sun rises, all creation sings hymns of praise to God. The flowers shake the night-dew from their petals and send up their perfume to their Creator. The birds drawing their heads from beneath their warm wings, sing their morning canticles. Now, man is master of the universe. Therefore he should gather together these perfumes and these voices and offer them to God along with the homage and adoration of his whole being.

2. Unfortunately, there are many who never give the slightest thought to God when they rise in the morning. Or perhaps they think that a quick, mechanical sign of the cross satisfies all their religious obligations. A good Christian could not behave in this fashion. He kneels to say his morning prayers, and raises his mind and heart to God in acts of thanksgiving, reparation and

love. Only in this way can he begin the day with peace and confidence, knowing that during it he will have continual need of God's assistance. If hitherto you have not behaved like this, make up your mind to begin every day in future by offering yourself to God along with all your work, plans, and worries. This offering will be a wonderful spiritual advantage throughout the day.

3. If possible, it is desirable to begin the day by visiting Jesus. He is always in the tabernacle waiting patiently and lovingly for us to visit Him. Why could we not spend at least one half-hour with Him? There are twenty-four hours in the day. Must we spend them in sleep, work, amusement, and conversation without ever pausing to speak with Jesus? What about Mass and Holy Communion? It is true that we are not obliged to go to Mass on weekdays, nor have we a strict obligation to receive Holy Communion except during the Paschal period. But a genuine Christian should not be satisfied with doing only what is commanded under pain of mortal sin. He should love Jesus so much that he will experience an urgent need of communication with Him. He should be ready to sacrifice a little of his early-morning sleep for the purpose of receiving Jesus in Holy Communion. There is no surer way of being able to resist the temptations of the day and of acquiring peace of spirit. The practice of daily Communion can transform a man's life.

15th February

THE ORDER OF THE DAY

1. Monks and nuns can have a fixed daily rule of life, but this is not possible for everybody. However, everybody will find it useful to have a general timetable capable of being varied to suit different circumstances. In constructing a general rule of life for ourselves, we should keep two things in mind, namely the

division of the day into periods and the way in which we shall behave during these periods.

It is hopeless to begin the day without any pre-arranged plan. Either there is going to be order or disorder. If there is disorganisation, it will produce two results. (1) There will be hurry and confusion in fulfilling those duties which have been left over until the end of the day. (2) There will be protracted periods of idleness, during which we shall persuade ourselves that there will be plenty of time to get everything done before nightfall.

To avoid such a situation, everyone should have a timetable adopted to his requirements. Naturally, it should be capable of any reasonable variations which circumstances may suggest, but in the meantime it will help us to get through our day calmly and with results.

2. Besides organising our day on the basis of a timetable, it is wise to work out in advance the way in which we shall behave during the different hours. It is easy to be taken by surprise, carried away by events, and as a result to waste time or do things badly. We should make up our minds as to how we should behave in the presence of God and in the presence of men. Concerning our relations with God, the best resolution is to begin the day by prayer and, if possible, a visit to the Church. Our ideal will be to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion. During the day, especially in moments of trial, we shall raise our minds and hearts to God by means of short ejaculations. We shall live in the presence of God; we shall live in His life. We shall end the day by making a visit, however brief, to the Blessed Sacrament, and by saying our evening prayers. When we are going to sleep we shall say certain prayers and remember the presence of God. This is a day in the life of a good Christian. How many can say they spend their day like this?

3. Once we have decided on our manner of behaviour towards God, it is necessary to determine how we shall act in regard to our neighbour. We can have quite a number of unexpected

matters to which we must attend during the day, but normally we have a good idea what kind of people we shall be dealing with. There will be people who are an occasion of sin. We must try and avoid these, but if that is not possible we must be on our guard and rely on the weapons of divine grace to protect us. There will be troublesome and annoying people, with whom we must be patient and restrained. There will be people who are in want, either materially or spiritually, whom we must enlighten and assist. We shall meet difficult and complicated problems, to deal with which we must ask God for insight and prudence. If we live in intimate union with Our Lord, we shall be competent to deal with all the business of the day, especially with the unexpected.

16th February

THE DUTIES OF OUR STATE

1. Everyone finds himself in a certain position in life. He may be there either through force of circumstances or through somebody else's desire or through some secret inspiration from God. In any case, each of us is in a certain place, and God either wills it or permits it. We should not complain about our state in life. No matter what that state is, we can either be saved or damned for all eternity. In any position we can do a great deal of good or a great deal of evil, according to the way in which we co-operate with the grace of God. We should not envy the positions of others. This would be unjust, because it would be tantamount to questioning the arrangements of Providence, which gives everyone the graces necessary in his particular state. It would also be injurious, in so far as we should be worried and disturbed instead of working peacefully and earnestly in the place assigned to us by God.

2. Some are called by God to the lofty state of the priesthood or of the religious life. This is a very great grace. We should

co-operate generously and do our best to overcome any obstacles we meet. Others are called to become good Christian fathers and mothers and to rear a family. This is a most important role, because the proper education of children and the future of the Church and of society depend on it. Every position has its obligations, which each of us should work hard to fulfil in every detail. The grace appropriate to our state will be available to us. But this grace has to be balanced by a sincere determination on our part to carry out carefully the duties of our state. Let us examine ourselves in this regard. If we discover that we have been neglectful or deficient in any way, let us resolve to put things right.

3. Let us be content or at least resigned in the position in which Providence has placed us. Let us pay special attention to those things which we are obliged to do. Anything which is not necessary should be left until later, even if it is more pleasant or seems more worthwhile in itself. Let us never become involved in business which is incompatible with our state or dangerous to our eternal welfare. Let us not make light of minor offences against the duties of our station. Smaller transgressions gradually become greater. Above all, let us try and sanctify our calling. It is one thing to work conscientiously, another to work in a spirit of holiness. Even pagans can do their duty earnestly. Doing our duty is only a help to our eternal salvation if it is done with God's grace for the purpose of serving Him, for His love and glory. This should be our manner of behaviour. If it is, we can claim to have sanctified our state in life and to have made our work holy.

17th February

THE WILL

1. The coat of arms of the great city of Chicago bears the motto "I will." With this forceful approach to its programme

of expansion, it was not long before it became one of the largest cities in America. It grew to be a wealthy industrial centre, in which skyscrapers, factories and churches sprang up side by side.

When it is said with sincerity and determination, this little phrase, "I will," is capable of producing amazing results both in the physical and spiritual order. St. Thomas Aquinas was once asked by a nun what were the requirements for sanctity. He replied that the chief thing necessary was a strong and decisive act of the will, which would be certain to be reinforced by divine grace. The Saints began every project by making a sincere and definite resolution to succeed. They were weak creatures like the rest of us, but they knew that if they wanted something intensely enough God would grant whatever miracles they needed. The father who asked Jesus to heal his son pleaded: *If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us*, to which Jesus replied: *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*¹ The same answer could be given to any of us who say that we are anxious to become holy. Anything is possible if we really want it, because God will do the rest.

2. St. Paul seems to contradict this idea when he writes: *There is question not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy.*²

What he says is true. Our will is inadequate to effect anything without the grace of God. But it is equally true that the grace of God is not sufficient without an act of the will on our part. God created us as intelligent beings with the marvellous gift of free will. Because He respects the liberty which He gave us He will not compel us by His grace to become holy. He only assists us. His assistance is absolutely necessary, because of ourselves we are incapable of forming a good intention, let alone performing a good action. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves*, St. Paul says elsewhere, *to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*³

It is necessary, therefore, that our resolutions should be

accompanied by the grace of God. We should pray fervently and make firm decisions. We must pray for divine grace, but it depends on our own will to ensure that God's grace produces results in us. This is the only way in which we can become perfect.

3. We are assured of this by St. Paul and by all the Saints. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me,*⁴ wrote the Apostles of the Gentiles. *By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been fruitless—in fact, I have laboured more than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*⁵

So let us go forward. Be determined. Work hard. Above all, pray humbly and fervently for the grace of God, without which we can do nothing that is good.

¹ Mk. 9, 16-22.

² Rom. 9, 16.

³ 2 Cor. 3, 5.

⁴ Phil. 4, 13.

⁵ 1 Cor. 15, 10.

18th February

INTERIOR SILENCE

1. Many people allow themselves to be swept away in the confusion of the world around them. Modern life has become a whirling machine which snatches men up into its enormous rotators and carries them with it. Not only has it become difficult to remain a Christian, but it is even difficult to continue to be a man.

We cannot cast aside the natural gifts of intellect, free will, and personal dignity which God has given us. Still less can we renounce the dignity of being Christians. This dignity can be retained by interior recollection, which will be nourished by divine grace if we ask for it and will find its external expression in good works. A man must be able to detach himself from the din of modern life and spend an occasional moment in recollection. No matter what is going on around him he must be able

to find time to raise his mind to God. Otherwise he will realise one day that life has passed him by like a cloud or, worse still, like a lost battle. We shall not be tormented with useless regrets on our deathbed if we think about this now.

2. God speaks readily when our souls are silent. He cannot be heard in the noise of the world. But we do not have to abandon our normal way of life in order to find a little interior recollection. It is enough to pause for a moment and remember God's presence. Once we have formed the habit of doing this, it becomes quite easy at any time and in any place. We may be walking along the street or in the middle of our work. We may be in a room full of people chatting together. Wherever we are, we shall be able to pause and raise our minds to God. If we acquire this habit, we can lead peaceful lives on a completely supernatural level.

3. It is much easier to recollect ourselves in the Church in front of the altar. For this reason one could not sufficiently recommend a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every morning before going to work and every evening before going to bed.

The ideal is always daily Mass and Holy Communion. This will be tiring and may be inconvenient. But God is infinitely good and will handsomely reward us for anything we do out of love for Him or for our own spiritual welfare.

19th February

GOOD INSPIRATIONS

1. God speaks to us in many ways. He speaks in the language of nature. Sky and earth tell us of their Creator. Walk in silence beneath the night sky and contemplate the myriads of stars above. It is impossible not to sense the power and beauty of the infinite

God. Look at the flowers in the meadows and the silent forests. Look out across the vast expanse of the ocean, where the waves are breaking and surging but never cross the limits imposed on them by their Creator. It is easy to repeat the words of St. Augustine: *How great and good You are, O God!* The voice of God can also be heard in sermons and instructions, in the example which the Saints give us, in the advice of confessors and Superiors and others whose task in life it is to enlighten and guide the faithful. Let us listen to these voices, for they represent the voice of God.

2. There is one very special way in which God communicates with us. He condescends to speak directly to us in the intimacy of our hearts. Our ears do not hear this voice, but we experience it in the depth of the spirit. When we are tempted to fall into sin, suddenly we hear its warning tones. Perhaps when we have already fallen, this voice pursues us again, inviting us to return to God. Sometimes after Holy Communion we converse with God and He speaks gently, making us understand that true happiness can be found only in His love and service. These are the holy inspirations which God gives us. At such moments we should reply meekly like the prophet Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*¹

Moreover, we should follow Samuel's example in putting into practice the instructions of the Lord.

3. These good inspirations are a wonderful gift from God, but it can be disastrous to refuse to hear them. Are we being called to reform our lives? Let us begin immediately the hard task of changing ourselves. Are we being called to Christian perfection? Let us be generous. Remember the words of Bossuet who said that perfection is like a high mountain which must be conquered step by step. So begin the ascent right away in obedience to God's wishes. Remember that to ignore a holy inspiration is an insult to God and a deviation from the straight path of perfection. It is a proof that we do not love Jesus and are

not prepared to be faithful to Him. In fact, we are risking our own eternal salvation. Remember the case of the young man in the Gospel who was asked to leave everything and follow Jesus along the way of perfection. He did not do so, and we cannot say with certainty whether or not his soul was saved.

¹ 1 Kings 3, 9-10.

20th February

THE FIVE TRIBUNALS

1. We can distinguish five courts of justice, each of which passes sentence on us. (1) The first is the tribunal of public opinion, of which some people are so afraid. (2) Then there is our own conscience, which shows us what we are and what we ought to be. (3) The third is the tribunal of Penance and (4) the fourth is the civil court. (5) Lastly, there is the judgment seat of God before which we shall have to appear one day with all our sins and our few merits.

Public opinion can be deceived by subterfuge and hypocrisy. Conscience can be ignored, or it can become warped or deadened. The tribunal of Penance can be misused, and we can remain obdurate in our sins. Civil authority can sometimes be evaded; it is also open to deception and corruption. But the tribunal of God is different. We shall be alone before Him—fraud and deceit will be useless. There will be no excuses, no defence. Everything will be clear, and His judgment will be just and unchangeable. Let us reflect on this while we have time. Let us adopt the necessary remedies, for soon there will be no more time.

2. The tribunal of God is the one for which we must be specially prepared, because our eternal happiness or unhappiness depends on it. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the existence of the others. We have to consider public opinion. It is not

that we should be anxious to put up a good appearance before it, but we should try and give good example to our neighbours rather than become the cause of scandal. *Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*¹

Conscience is a court of justice to which we must pay more attention. This is the medium God often uses when He exhorts us to change our lives or to strive towards perfection. The tribunal of Penance is the only sure way for the sinner to return to the friendship of God, although in case of necessity he could obtain pardon by an act of perfect contrition. Finally, we must respect civil authority. All authority comes from God, and for this reason we must obey the civil law in the manner of good citizens.

3. In regard to civil authority, however, one thing should be made quite clear. We are only obliged to obey it when it does not infringe on the rights of God or of the Church. If it should run counter to these we should answer in the words of St. Peter and the other Apostles when they were called before the Sanhedrin: *We must obey God rather than men.*²

If we had to suffer anything as a result in the cause of God and of the Church, we should count that as our good fortune. Like the Apostles, we should be able to rejoice that we have been found worthy to suffer indignity and ill-treatment for the sake of Jesus' name.³

¹ Mt. 5, 16.

² Acts 5, 29.

³ Acts 5, 41.

21st February

LORD, THAT I MAY SEE!

1. When Jesus was approaching the gates of Jericho one day, a blind man was sitting on the ground, begging for alms. He heard the sound of a crowd on the road and asked what was

happening. He was informed that Jesus was passing. Then he experienced a sudden upsurge of faith and shouted out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people who were in front rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he cried in an even louder voice: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Then Jesus stopped and turned towards him. He gave orders that the man should be brought nearer to him. "What wouldst thou have me to do for thee?" He asked. "Lord," the blind man replied, "that I may see." Merciful as always, Jesus answered in a tone of command. "Receive thy sight, thy faith has saved thee." Immediately the blind man was able to see, and he followed Our Lord, crying out in praise of God.¹

Read the simple and vivid account of this incident in the Gospel. Meditate on the infinite goodness of Jesus, Who is always ready to come to our relief. Meditate also on the lively and spontaneous faith of this poor blind man. If our faith were of the same quality as his, we could obtain everything we asked from God.

2. Spiritually, we are all blind to a greater or less extent. Do we understand the infinite truth, beauty and goodness of God, in Whom our true happiness consists? Do we understand the emptiness of the world, despite the glory of its transient beauty which can never satisfy our hearts? Do we understand our own nothingness and our dependence on God for light and grace? If we understood all this, then the scales of our spiritual blindness would fall from our eyes. Our faith would be even purer and more heartfelt than that of the poor blind man of Jericho. If we do not possess this lively faith and our eyes are dazzled by the glittering vanities of the world, let us turn to Jesus and beseech Him: "Lord, that I may see! Only the light which comes from You is the true light which illumines every man who comes into this world."²

3. The restlessness and the intensity of living make us see things as different from what they are. But one day the veil of the

temple will be rent asunder before our frightened eyes and eternal light will break upon us. Then we shall be blind no longer, but we shall see everything in the light of eternity. Let us place ourselves now in the state in which we should like to find ourselves at that moment. Let us consider ourselves and everything else in the light of eternity. Then our blindness will disappear. Since we shall see everything in God's way we shall direct all our thoughts and actions towards Him.

¹ Luke 18, 35-43 ; Mark 10, 46-52 ² John 1, 9.

22nd February

WHY SHOULD IT HAPPEN TO ME?

1. When we are overtaken by some unexpected misfortune or sorrow, or are forced to undertake an unusually difficult job, we often forget to surrender ourselves into the hands of God and pray for help and peace of mind. Instead, we feel annoyed and discouraged and give vent to our feelings in a most unchristian manner. "Why should it happen to me?" This is the reaction of many people in such cases. "It had to happen to me!" they say. They forget that sanctity involves sacrifice, self-denial and resignation to the will of God. *The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force,*¹ the Gospel says. In other words, if a man wants to win Heaven he must be stern with himself and establish control over any perverse tendencies in his own nature.

2. When Jesus had been scourged and crowned with thorns, He was forced to set out towards the execution-ground on Calvary, carrying the heavy wooden cross. On the way He met a Cyrenean named Simon, who was probably returning from his work in the fields outside the city. The Jews had realised that Jesus had lost so much blood that He was unable to bear

the weight any longer. They felt no compassion for Him, but they were anxious to save their victim for the final punishment. With this in mind, they compelled Simon to carry Jesus' cross. The Cyrenean could have said: "Why pick on me? I am tired and must get home . . ." But his eyes met the tired gaze of Our Saviour. He saw that He was covered with wounds and streaming blood. Simon was deeply moved and willingly lifted the Cross which he carried to the place of execution.²

Picture Jesus, suffering and bleeding on the road to Calvary, and Simon removing the Cross from the shoulders of Our Saviour and transferring it to his own. How can we ever again rebel and complain when we meet with inconvenience or sorrow?

3. When the Saints were confronted by misfortune or suffering, they submitted and thanked God. They understood that this was the price of Heaven. *I reckon that the sufferings of the present time, St. Paul writes, are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us.*³

"So great is the reward which awaits me," St. Francis of Assisi was fond of saying, "it is a joy for me to suffer." Let our attitude be the same. Then we shall find it easier to win the battles of life and our troubles will be lightened by the brightest of all hopes, the hope of Heaven.

¹ Mt. 11, 12.

² Cf. Mt. 27, 32; Mark 15, 21; Luke 23, 26.

³ Rom. 8, 18.

23rd February

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1. Sin is the shipwreck of the soul. If the sin is serious, it is a fatal shipwreck. Confession is the only plank to which we can safely cling, if we want to be brought back to the harbour of God's grace. Admittedly, in cases of necessity we can regain God's friendship equally well by an act of perfect contrition

along with the intention of going to confession. But an act of perfect contrition demands an act of perfect love of God, which is not altogether easy. There can always be a doubt as to whether we have achieved the necessary degree of perfection. If, on the other hand, we receive the Sacrament of Penance with the proper dispositions, not only will it give us grace, but confidence and peace of mind as well. This sacrament has been very appropriately called the masterpiece of God's mercy. What would be our fate, poor sinners that we are, if God had not given the Apostles and their successors in the priesthood the sacramental power of forgiving sins? We should be very grateful to God for this great gift.

2. We should confess our sins humbly and sincerely. We are obliged to confess at least all the mortal sins which we have committed after Baptism and have never included in a previous good Confession. We should prepare for this Sacrament by making a careful examination of conscience in the presence of God. When we kneel before our confessor, we should remember that, even though he is only a man like ourselves, he is the representative of God. We should confess at least our mortal sins in a clear and exact manner. Whenever possible, we should confess deliberate venial sins in order to be sure of obtaining forgiveness for them. It is very necessary to be sincerely sorry for our sins and to be firmly resolved not to commit them again with the help of divine grace. Perfect contrition, which stems from a pure and disinterested act of love for God, is not necessary. Attrition is sufficient, that is, imperfect sorrow which springs from a lower supernatural motive, such as the fear of hell, the hideousness of sin in so far as it is an offence against God, or the loss of eternal happiness. Let us examine ourselves to ensure that we fulfil all the necessary conditions in our Confessions.

3. St. Charles Borromeo had the habit of going to Confession every day. This was not the result of scruples on his part; it was simply that he was supernaturally enlightened so as to perceive

even his smallest faults and he was anxious to remove from his soul the slightest trace of sin. We do not have to follow his example, but weekly or fortnightly Confession is strongly recommended by spiritual writers. It is a great loss to neglect Confession for too long a period. We are deprived of the graces of this Sacrament, our fervour grows cold, and we slip easily from venial into mortal sin. Let us decide to make a good Confession every week whenever we find it possible.

24th February

AVARICE AND AMBITION

1. The unscrupulous business man and the careerist have an ugly attitude to life. The former is concerned only with securing the highest possible profits by any means whatever, licit or illicit. The accumulation of money and wealth is like a fever which torments and brutalises the mind and heart. It extinguishes all noble human sentiment; moreover, it destroys religion.

Careerism is a similar kind of viciousness. The careerist is driven by a mad desire to carve out a career for himself at all costs, even if he has to make use of lies, adulation, and bribery in the pursuit of his ambition. His ambition is to win glory and esteem and to hold the highest and most honourable positions, which naturally command the best salaries as well.

The Gospel is severe in its warning to these two classes of people. *What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹ *Seek the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides.*²

2. Although the Gospel stresses so much the necessity of being detached from the things of the world and of striving after the things of Heaven, it is a sad fact that from the early days of the Church up to the present time greed for money and desire for honour have always been there to do great harm to the faithful.

In his first letter St. Peter exhorted priests to guide and look after their flocks *not for the sake of base gain, but eagerly; nor yet as lording it over your charges, but becoming from the heart a pattern to the flock.*³ He went on to urge the faithful to be humble, obedient and detached from the desires of the world. He told them to entrust their cares to God, their protector. Let us examine how well we follow this counsel and resolve to correct any deficiencies in our behaviour.

3. What is our attitude in regard to these matters? We are not forbidden, naturally, to look after our own affairs and our work. In fact, it is our duty to do so to whatever degree is demanded by the circumstances in which we live. Similarly, it is not forbidden to try and better our social position. All this must be done, however, with a due sense of proportion and by the proper means. The first concern in our life should be the service of God. This is what we were created for; this is what we must wholeheartedly aim at doing. Only in this way can we secure peace of mind and attain eternal salvation. Everything else must be secondary to our ultimate purpose in life. Otherwise God would be in a position inferior to ourselves, and this would be equivalent to robbing for ourselves the honour and glory due to our Creator and Redeemer. Think earnestly about this truth.

¹ Mt. 16, 25.

² Mt. 6, 33 ; Luke 12, 31.

³ 1 Peter, 5, 3.

25th February

FERVOUR AND TEPIDITY

1. The only choice in the life of a Christian is between fervour and sin. The tepid or negligent soul cannot remain long in the grace of God, and when God's grace is removed, it means the death of the soul. The spiritual life resembles a steep hill. A man cannot stay still. He must keep going upwards or begin to slip

downwards. Whoever struggles on up the hill is approaching perfection and Heaven; whoever slips backwards is approaching sin and Hell. There is no middle way. Those who are lukewarm are an object of disgust to their Creator, Who casts them away from Himself. *Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,* the Holy Spirit says, *I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.*¹

So it is not enough to be mediocre Christians. The half-hearted and indifferent are already travelling along the slippery path of sin and are on the waiting-list for Hell. It is dangerous for anyone to remain thoughtlessly in this state of spiritual ineptitude. A man who never thinks of his own salvation is suffering from a serious illness. He is running a grave risk of eternal damnation.

2. Our Lord does not command us to be merely virtuous. He commands us to be perfect. *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*² He tells us to love Him with our whole heart and our whole soul. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul.*³ He orders us to renounce everything rather than offend Him,⁴ even to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand or foot if it should present an obstacle to our eternal salvation.⁵ How can we remain unmoved and inactive in face of these exhortations? The grade of perfection to which Our Lord calls us cannot be reached without His grace, which we can only obtain by fervent and unceasing prayer. Fervour is the animating principle of the spiritual life. It wins God's gifts for us and makes us almost immune from sin.

3. We can become fervent by eliminating the causes of tepidity. These are: (a) The lack of a living faith. The remedy is frequent meditation on the eternal truths in order to arouse our faith and make us think more constantly of Heaven. (b) The spirit of the world and inordinate attachment to worldly things, which are like bonds restricting us in our advance towards God. Let us remember that the world passes away and cannot satisfy our souls which have been made for God. Let us seek Him, therefore, and love Him above all. (c) Our lack of perseverance

in doing good. It is not easy to preserve constant intimacy with God, even at times when we seem to have become spiritually dried up and deprived of all supernatural consolation. It is not easy to persevere in our resistance to the attractions of the world and of sin. It is not easy to pray constantly even when God does not seem to heed us. It is no wonder that we grow tired and discouraged. But let us remember that God rewards His faithful servants by making them fervent in prayer and in action. So let us be constant. We shall be rewarded with spiritual fervour, which will give us the joy and inner peace which conquer every obstacle and are the prelude to unending happiness with God in Heaven.

¹ Apoc. 3, 16.² Mt. 5, 48.³ Mt. 22, 37.⁴ Luke 14, 33.⁵ Mt. 18, 8.

26th February

VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

1. After the many plans and worries of the day, it is wonderful to visit a church in the evening and kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. There we can adore Jesus and converse lovingly with him. We have spent so many hours surrounded by the noise of the world. It is restful now to spend a quarter of an hour in silent prayer before Jesus, the prisoner of love in the Tabernacle. It is He Who invites us. *Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*¹ There are so many matters worrying us. We need some words of advice which will clear our doubts and strengthen us in suffering. We need words of encouragement to banish our sadness and enliven our faith. We need words of love which will light in our hearts the flame of love for God. We can find all this on our knees before the Tabernacle. Do not end the day without seeking a renewal of Christian strength at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

2. Let us consider the infinite goodness of Jesus. He became

man for us, and spent thirty-three years on earth, *doing good and healing all.*² More than this, He chose to remain with us until the end of time, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, to be our friend and comforter and the food of our souls. In his infinite power and goodness, is there anything more He could have done for us? All day He waits there, anxious to heal our ills, to console us in our troubles, and to give us the strength to persevere in our journey towards perfection and towards Heaven. Let us listen to that loving voice. Do not be ungrateful for this miracle of infinite goodness. Let us go to Jesus as often as we can, especially in the evening when our day is nearly over. We shall find Him a true friend Who is always ready to listen; better still, He is a friend Who is able and willing to help us.

3. *Taste and see how good the Lord is: happy the man who takes refuge in him.*³ Many people, unfortunately, place their trust in men and in worldly things. They soon see the mistake they have made and are disillusioned and embittered. It was not so with the Saints. They spent long hours by day and night praying to Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, and carried away with them reserves of spiritual strength and tranquillity. When they could not visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, many of them would go to some place where they could see a church and remain there in adoration. Whenever duty made it impossible for St. Stanislaus Kostka to remain before the Tabernacle, He asked his Angel Guardian to adore Jesus for him. If we were on fire with love for God, as the Saints were, we should do the same.

¹ Mt. II, 28.² Acts IO, 38.³ Ps. 33, 9.

27th February

EVENING PRAYER

I. We should pray all the time, because we always need the help of God. *They must always pray and not lose heart.*¹ There are certain times, however, when this need of God is greater than

usual. This is so when we are tempted, or when we are threatened by some evil, whether spiritual or physical. Our need is also greater when we have some important decision to make or difficult task to undertake. When we are close to death this need of God is exceptionally urgent.

Apart from these occasions, there is a time every day when we should feel a special need to kneel and pray to God. This is when we are going to bed. Before retiring, we should kneel by the bedside and say our prayers fervently. We have many reasons for praying. (1) We should thank God for His graces during the day. (2) We should ask forgiveness for our lack of co-operation with the gifts He has given us. (3) We should ask the good God to grant us new favours.

2. A page in the story of our lives is closed. For all we know it may be the last. Sleep is a symbol of death. How can we be certain that this night will not be our last? A large number of people die during their sleep. For this reason our night prayers should include an act of sincere contrition for our sins, an act of love for God, our supreme benefactor, and an act of complete resignation to His will. When we are in bed, we should repeat the words of Jesus on the cross. *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*² If this prayer is on our lips and in our heart, we can sleep in peace.

3. We must remember, moreover, that during the night we can be assailed by many dangers to soul and body. The devil stops at nothing in his efforts to seduce us. Any one who goes to bed with no other thought than getting a pleasant night's sleep has neglected to ask for God's blessing and is running the risk of yielding to temptation. During these hours of necessary inactivity the devil can come with all his wiles to tempt us. In the beginning there will be idle day-dreams, then impure images, and finally the full-blooded onslaught of temptation. It would be disastrous if we were caught unprepared and without any help from God. But this assistance can be obtained by fervent

and constant prayer. If it is always necessary to pray, it is especially necessary when we are inactive and therefore in a state of continual danger from the seductions of the devil. So let our day close with prayer, and from prayer we shall pass on to sleep. Let us offer to God this sleep, so necessary for the restoration of bodily energy. Let us make the intention of offering every breath we draw as an act of obedience and of the love of God.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

² Luke 23, 46 ; Ps. 30, 6.

28th February

THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

I. Remember the key to wisdom: "Know yourself." These words were written in Greek in golden letters on the fronton of the temple of the Delphic Apollo. They were the basic rule of the moral doctrine of Socrates and other philosophers. But if we are to know ourselves well, we must examine ourselves thoroughly. We must place ourselves before ourselves without any concealment or deception and judge ourselves fairly and severely. The examination of conscience is recommended not only by spiritual writers of the Church, but also by pagan philosophers. Seneca's famous words in this regard are worth meditating. "Anger will disappear or subside," he says, "when you know that you have to present yourself for judgment every day. Is there any finer custom than this daily examination of conscience? What peace follows from this examination of ourselves! How tranquil, wise and free the mind becomes, whether it has been praised or reprov'd, when it has acted a its own secret investigator and critic and has examined its own behaviour. I use this exercise and put myself on trial every day. When the lights are out and silence has fallen . . . I look back over

the entire day and review my words and actions. I hide nothing from myself; I omit nothing. Why should I be afraid of any of my errors when I can say to myself: Take care not to do this again; this time I forgive you."

2. Pope St. Pius X holds greater authority for a Christian. In his "Exhortatio ad Clerum" he strongly recommends the examination of conscience especially at the close of the day. This examination, he says, is necessary for priests, but it is no less necessary for the laity. He recalls the apt words of St. Augustine: *Judge your own conscience. Demand an account from it. Dig deep and rend it apart. Discover all the evil thoughts and intentions of the day . . . and punish yourself for them.*² He also quotes the equally relevant words of St. Bernard. *Be a searching inquirer into your own integrity of life; examine your conduct every day. See how much you have advanced, or how much you have fallen back . . . Learn to know yourself . . . Place all your faults before your eyes. Stand before yourself, as if it were before somebody else, and you will find reason to weep over yourself.*³ The saintly Pontiff concludes his inspiring address as follows: *Experience has proved that anyone who makes a strict examination of his thoughts, words and actions, is more firmly resolved to hate and avoid what is evil and wholeheartedly to love what is good.*⁴

3. It is necessary and profitable, therefore, to end the day with an examination of conscience made in the presence of God. Enter into ourselves; examine our thoughts, words and actions. Examine also the motives behind our actions and see whether they have been distorted or really directed towards God. Examine the sins we have committed, so that we may beg for pardon and form resolutions to do better. See whether we have prayed fervently or distractedly and half-heartedly. See if we have co-operated with the graces and good inspirations which we have been given. See if we have improved or grown worse in our efforts to do good. See if we have been dissipated or close to God. From a close examination of this kind we shall draw an

incitement to humility and repentance, as well as to greater determination in the future.

¹ De Ira, III, 36.

² Expos. in Ps. 4, n. 8.

³ Meditat., Cap. 5, de quotidiano sui ipsius examine.

⁴ Acta Pii X, IV, p. 257.

29th February

THE APOSTOLATE OF PRAYER

1. Everybody cannot be an apostle in the strict sense of the term. Not everyone can dedicate his whole life to the expansion of God's kingdom upon earth and to the conversion of pagans, heretics and sinners. Everybody can do a little in this cause, however. Perhaps you cannot leave your family, as the missionaries do, and travel to distant lands to extend the kingdom of God. Perhaps you cannot enter a convent or dedicate yourself to God as a priest or as a religious, because you have not received this high vocation from God. We know, however, that each of us has some responsibility for his neighbour and must help him whenever possible. "*Go surety for your neighbour according to your means.*"¹

Now, the Association of the Apostleship of Prayer offers everybody a simple way of doing exactly this. Its object is to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially by means of prayer in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Besides prayer, we must offer the actions and sufferings of each day. Let us decide to join with all the faithful in offering the prayers, and actions and sufferings of each day to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We shall certainly receive a shower of graces, both for ourselves and our neighbour.

2. The Popes have blessed and endowed with favours and indulgences this Association which St. Pius X has gone so far

as to call the most useful of all the pious Associations.² If you are not already enrolled, therefore, become a member as soon as possible. By enrolling you undertake the obligations of living a good Christian life and of saying the following short prayer every day:

“Divine Heart of Jesus, I offer You through the Immaculate Heart of Mary the prayers, actions and sufferings of this day.”

In this way we unite ourselves to the vast outpouring of prayer and to the precious offering of actions and sufferings presented by the whole Church in union with the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

3. When we enrol in the Apostleship of Prayer, we are sure that when we work, suffer, and pray, we are not alone in our efforts, but are united with the Church praying, working, and suffering. Our offerings, united with the prayers, labours and sufferings of many holy souls, find their way through the mediation of the Heart of Mary, our beloved Mother, to the Divine Heart of Jesus. He hears them without fail; He blesses them, and received them on our behalf in propitiation for our sins and in supplication for graces for ourselves and for our neighbour.

¹ Ecclus. 29, 20.

² Letter to the Director General of the Apostleship of Prayer, 9th April, 1911.

MARCH

1st March

CATHOLIC ACTION

1. Catholic action is the participation of the laity, or more correctly their co-operation, in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church. It is not really an innovation. It is as old as the Church herself, although it is only on account of the peculiar circumstances of our times that it has come to be organised in a special manner. From the beginning of Christianity, the laity of both sexes worked energetically alongside the Apostles for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. When St. Paul was writing to the Philippians he urged them to assist those Christian women who had done so much to spread the Gospel, as well as Clement and his other fellow-workers. "Help them, for they have toiled with me in the gospel, as have Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers whose names are in the book of life."¹ It is evident that even at that time there were laymen and women working in co-operation with the apostolic hierarchy. Every Christian, moreover, should feel the need to do this. Anyone who has the true faith and is on fire with the love of God and of his neighbour cannot but exert himself so that all men may reach the truth and live in accordance with it, that is, in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel. Anyone who is not motivated by this desire cannot claim to be a genuine and enthusiastic Christian.

2. The need for a lay apostolate has grown tremendously in our day. The scarcity of priests is not the only reason for this.

It is true that their numbers are entirely inadequate in many places to meet the spiritual needs of the people. But there is the additional factor that certain spheres cannot easily be penetrated by the clergy. There are many people who never even enter a church. They never have any contact with the priest, who finds it difficult to approach them. He needs a "long arm" which will bear the light where he cannot carry it himself. The lay apostolate can be this "long arm". Catholic workmen can do an amount of good among their fellow workers by word and by example. So can teachers, clerks, doctors, journalists, and the rest. This kind of environmental apostolate is very valuable today. It must be built up into a system of blood-vessels which will carry the stream of Christian life from its heart, which is the priesthood, to the farthest extremities of society. Let Christian laymen recognise that this is an honourable vocation which they have received, for it is a participation in the priestly office. Everyone should feel summoned to do everything possible in his own environment to lead souls to Christ.

3. Spiritual formation is necessary for this task. The layman must be a sincere and earnest Christian. Otherwise, he will not be able to transmit to others what he has not got himself. He must live the life of the Church and help it to fulfil its saving mission. To say that he must co-operate with the priest is the same as saying that he must co-operate with Christ, for the priest must be another Christ. So it is a high honour which the layman assumes when he dedicates himself to the apostolate and he will enjoy many consolations.

If anyone deliberately refuses to undertake this apostolate, his faith is neither alive nor active. If our faith is to be sincere and effective, we must first of all undergo a strenuous spiritual training, nourished by prayer and by divine grace. As a consequence, we shall work generously to bring about the triumph of the life of Christ in other souls also.

2nd March

SPIRITUAL LANGUOR

1. Sometimes we become tired and sleepy. The love of God no longer warms our hearts nor prompts us to perform good works. We experience a kind of disgust for spiritual things and prayer becomes a burden. We no longer feel any pleasure in speaking with God, for our souls have grown arid and cold. We neglect our spiritual exercises and are careless about meditation and the Sacraments. We go on living on the edge of the abyss and never consider the fact that it is a very short step from spiritual inactivity to actual sin.

This kind of languor is not always sinful, however. Sometimes God permits dryness of spirit to test our humility and to make us understand that without Him we are capable of nothing. Saints like St. Theresa and St. Francis de Sales were tried by spiritual aridity. In such cases the only remedy is to be patient and humble and to trust in God. We must ask God to let us die rather than be separated from Him, and to restore to us our former fervent love for Him.

2. Sometimes this state of ineptitude is the result of pride. We are too fond of ourselves. We seek to satisfy ourselves in everything and therefore God abandons us. Whoever seeks God finds Him. Whoever seeks his own ends finds disillusionment and emptiness. God abandons him and allows him to fall humiliateingly in punishment for his pride and self-confidence. St. Peter is an example of this. God withholds spiritual consolations from the arrogant soul. If our state of tepidity is the result of pride, let us humble ourselves before God. Let us implore Him to deprive us of all worldly consolation rather than of His friendship.

3. More often this languor and inertia is caused by our neglect of the means necessary to preserve our spiritual life. We begin by omitting the prayers and penances which it is our duty to

perform and by postponing Confession and Communion. Without frequent Confession our sins increase like noxious weeds which stifle the good grain. Without Holy Communion we lack the protection and grace of God. Let us examine ourselves and make good resolutions. Fervour of soul, the love of God and a strong and effective inclination to virtue cannot be attributed purely to ourselves. They are the result of God's grace, for which we should pray without ceasing.

3rd March

THE SHORTNESS OF TIME

1. We often complain about the swift passage of time. Hours, days, and years pass us by, never to return. When we think about the past, do we feel consoled or depressed? How many hours have we spent on useless pursuits such as idle conversation or excessive entertainment? How many have we devoted to serious sin? How many, on the other hand, have we spent in prayer, mortification or apostolic work? How many have we devoted to helping our neighbour by our charitable assistance or advice? Weigh it all up. If we discover that the time uselessly or badly spent far outweighs the time spent to our own advantage or to the advantage of others, let us determine to make good the deficit. Resolve to use God's precious gift of time in a manner befitting a reasonable being and a Christian, who knows that he has been created for eternity.

2. When we are dying, we shall think with sorrow of our past life. Then we shall fully understand the fleeting nature of time and the vanity of worldly things. The world, with its empty grandeur and hollow or sinful pleasures, will seem like a cloud which passes or like a curtain which is drawn to reveal the entrance to eternity. Our only comfort will be the number

of hours which we have given to prayer and mortification, to charitable work for our poor brothers in Christ and to apostolic labours. All the rest will have passed away, never to return. But the good which we have done will remain as our supreme consolation in that final hour.

3. Another vision will confront us also in that final hour. Our frightened minds will see again all those hours which we have misused in sin. The devil will try by every means in his power to repaint them in our troubled imagination. He will do his best to lead us into despair, even as he tempted Judas and many other sinners before us. We know well that the mercy of God is infinite, and that it remains infinite at the hour of death. But we know also that His justice is no less infinite. Since God has granted us so much time in which He called us to repentance and to a life of virtue, it could happen that at the point of death He will put an end to the mercy and to the favours which He has shown us and which we have disregarded. What will become of us then? Remember that only one of the two thieves was converted. The other died unrepentant on his cross, even though he was hanging by the side of Jesus. Reflect and make provision while there is still time. *While we have time, let us do good.*¹ We shall be unable to do anything about it afterwards.

¹ Gal. 6, 10.

4th March

THE IMITATION OF THE SAINTS

1. We are taught by words, and we are attracted by examples. Speech is a wonderful gift from God. By means of it we photograph our thoughts, as it were, and communicate them to others. We express our wishes and our commands; we give life and colour to the innermost feelings of the heart. We can employ the spoken word to do great good or to do great evil. We can teach and educate, or we can deceive and corrupt.

Speech is an extraordinary gift, and one day we shall have to render God a strict account of it. Learn from the Saints. They understood perfectly that they would have to account not only for evil or deceitful words, but *that of every idle word men speak, they shall give account on the day of judgment.*¹ For this reason their conversation was always impregnated with divine wisdom. By their instruction and advice they raised men's minds to an appreciation of heavenly truths and encouraged them to practise virtue. They did this not only by word, but also by example. Their own lives were a complete theoretical and practical model which led others towards sanctity.

2. Sacred Scripture says of Jesus that he *did and taught.*² We should reflect on these words. Very often we come across thinkers who teach but do nothing. Sometimes they even act contrary to their own precepts, and then their work is futile and harmful. Many unfortunate young men are the victims of the false ideas and bad example of their teachers. It was not so with Jesus, nor was it so with the Saints, His faithful followers. We can learn much from their writings, and still more from their example. For this reason we should read about their lives. People read so many books and reviews which teach them nothing, and many others which arouse their lower instincts and smother their high ideals. A good Christian should read *The Lives of the Saints* as well as those books which it is his duty to know. The highest and most useful school of learning for a sincere Christian is the reading of the Gospel and *The Lives of the Saints*.

3. If we read *The Lives of the Saints*, we cannot fail to be inspired by their example. We shall learn the burning love of God from the missionary zeal of St. Paul, who feels that he himself has ceased to live, but that Jesus Christ lives in him. We shall learn detachment from worldly things and the love of holy poverty from St. Francis of Assisi. We shall learn from St. Theresa and from St. Philip Neri to love God alone, and

from St. Francis de Sales peace of mind in the midst of misfortune. We shall learn to love purity more than life itself from St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. Maria Goretti. We can learn so many good and beautiful things from the lives of those whom the Church has elevated to her Altars. Let us read these lives with humility and devotion. We shall be happier and better as a result of our reading.

¹ Mt. 12, 36.

² Acts 1, 1.

5th March

OUR MARTYRDOM

1. St. Ambrose describes virtue as a slow martyrdom. In this sense we must all be martyrs. There is only one difference. The Martyrs of the Church shed their blood and gave up their lives for Jesus within one hour or one day and gained their reward immediately. Our martyrdom, on the other hand, will be prolonged. It will last all our lives and will end only when we accept death with resignation from the hands of God. Ours is the martyrdom of virtue. Let us clearly understand that solid Christian virtue is a slow and continual martyrdom which will end with death. It is not a flower which springs up spontaneously in the garden of the soul. It is like a seed which is thrown on the damp earth and must die there slowly so that it can generate young shoots which will produce the ears of corn. *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.*¹ It is necessary, then to descend into the mire of humility and to remain there until we die. Only after we have died to ourselves shall we rise again in God.² After the death of our lower instincts and vices we shall find a new life.

2. Perhaps we complain at times about the humiliations which

we have to endure and the temptations which we have to overcome. But this is the prolonged martyrdom of a virtuous life. *The kingdom of heaven, Jesus tells us, has been enduring violent assault and the violent have been seizing it by force.*³ We must struggle against ourselves and our evil inclinations in order to gain the kingdom of Heaven. Only those who fight can conquer. St. Paul says that nobody can win the crown of victory unless he has fought valiantly. *One who enters a contest is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules.*⁴ So let us resign ourselves willingly to the lengthy martyrdom of a good life. If we do, our martyrdom will prove easy and acceptable. We shall trust in God and shall be comforted by the thought of the crown which awaits us.

3. Those who go the way of worldly vanity and vice endure a martyrdom in any case. There is no doubt that their martyrdom is even more painful. Worldly pleasure is like a gilded cup which has a little honey on the rim but when it is drained leaves behind a bitter taste. St. Augustine says that God has ruled from all eternity that a disordered soul will be its own punishment. Sacrifice which demands heroic virtue leaves God's peace in the soul. Those sacrifices, on the other hand, which are demanded by a worldly life and excessive pleasures are a martyrdom which brings no reward and no happiness. Since either way we must undergo a martyrdom in this life, let us choose the sweet martyrdom of virtue. Our reward will be in Heaven.

¹ John 12, 24-25.

² Cf. *ibid.*

³ Mt. 11, 12.

⁴ 2 Tim. 2, 5.

6th March

HOLY CONTENTMENT

1. We must not think that there is anything sad or sullen about virtue. It is quite otherwise. Virtue is the only real

happiness. It is a quiet contentment, based on and depending on God, which is not afraid of dangers or difficulties because it knows that everything can be overcome with the help of God. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*¹ This happiness is not founded on passing pleasures, but on the confident expectation of the everlasting joys of Heaven. It can exist even in the midst of difficulties and sorrows, because these detach us from the world and raise us to a higher level. When the Jews first persecuted the infant Church, the Apostles were said to have been happy to suffer for the name of Christ.² This is an example of the contentment which accompanies virtue, the peace which neither threats nor injuries can destroy. Seek this lasting happiness. Do not despise the lesser pleasures of this world as long as they are innocent, for everything is good and beautiful which comes from God. Do not become too fond of them, however. Remember that God alone can fill our hearts with real happiness.

2. Some people picture the Saints as grim and austere men, shut away in the ivory tower of their own sanctity. Nothing could be further from the truth. Admittedly, there were some Saints who practised austerities and penances which would astonish and frighten many of us to-day. Even in the midst of the voluntary acts of mortification, however, they were full of holy joy. They no longer craved for anything in this world; they desired Heaven alone. It is said that St. Romuald's countenance was always so radiantly cheerful that anyone who looked at him felt happy. The gaiety of St. Philip Neri and many others has become a well-known legend. Heaven was already in their hearts. We cannot all arrive at such a height of sanctity, but we can and must avoid vain and sinful pleasures and search for the real happiness which comes of a good life.

3. There is a story told about St. Francis of Assisi and another brother who were approaching the monastery after a long journey. They were tired and hungry and it was late. "When

we arrive at the monastery and knock at the door, the porter may not recognise us," St. Francis said to his companion. "He may send us away with hard words under the impression that we are a pair of thieves. If that happens, we shall be made to look ridiculous and shall have neither food nor lodging for the night . . . That would be pure joy, I'm telling you!" Naturally, it would be impossible for everyone to become quite as detached as this from worldly things. But we should all have that confidence in God which gives peace and spiritual contentment during the trials of life. The joy of Christian resignation is the knowledge that everything we suffer for the love of God helps us to merit Heaven.

¹ Phil. 4, 13.

² Acts 5, 41.

7th March

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

1. It is generally recognised that St. Thomas Aquinas was a great philosopher and theologian. The Cartesian philosopher, Jourdain, said of him that no other man had come so near to being infallible. The eclectic philosopher, Cousin, referred to the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas as one of the greatest masterpieces of human genius. Dante celebrated in immortal verse this wonderful synthesis of thought. When he canonised St. Thomas, John XXII declared that "every article he wrote was a miracle."

One might say that St. Thomas was raised up by God, for he gathered together the whole of human knowledge up to his own time and interpreted it in the new light of Christianity. He ordered it into a complete, compact body of philosophical and theological doctrine to serve as an impregnable defence

against the errors of his own and later times. In spite of his greatness, however, Thomas of Aquin was a very humble man. There is a good deal of truth in Pascal's remark that a little knowledge makes the mind proud, but real wisdom makes it humble. We cannot all imitate the knowledge of St. Thomas, but we should imitate his humility.

2. Thomas of Aquin was a wealthy nobleman of great intelligence. A brilliant future seemed to lie before him. But he answered the inspiration which called him to a life of Christian perfection in the Order of St. Dominic. This divine vocation encountered serious obstacles. His mother and brothers opposed it. The latter went as far as capturing him and imprisoning him in a castle, where they put him beside a woman who tempted him to sin against holy purity. But it was all useless. He chased away the temptress with a blazing torch. Then he knelt before a cross outlined upon the wall and as he was praying fervently he experienced such wonderful peace that it seemed like a foretaste of Heaven. From that day he was never again tried by temptations of the flesh. He was like an angel in human form.

Do we wish to share even a little in these rewards? Let us listen to the good inspirations which God gives us. Like St. Thomas, let us be ready to make any sacrifice rather than offend God. Let us be prepared to work earnestly to acquire the virtues proper to our state in life.

3. St. Thomas was not only a tireless student, but a man of unceasing prayer. He was accustomed to say that anything he ever learned was the result of prayer rather than study. In any case, as far as he was concerned, study and any other activity was a prayer. No matter what he was doing, his mind was absorbed with God. He died when he was about fifty years of age, but he was able to leave behind a masterpiece of human and divine wisdom which has probably never been surpassed.

Everything which is good and beautiful comes from God. Even though our stature is far less than that of St. Thomas,

we must constantly nourish our desires and intentions with prayer and focus them on good objects.

8th March

KNOWLEDGE AND GOODNESS

1. Joseph DeMaistre's views on the relationship between knowledge and goodness may seem a little extreme, but they are nothing but the truth. "If the guardianship of education is not restored to the Church, and if knowledge is not everywhere subordinated to goodness, the evils which await us will be incalculable. Science will brutalise us. Because of it men will become more savage than the barbarians."

We do not wish to speak slightly of knowledge. It is a gift from God, Who has given us our intellects to know the truth. But truth, like every created thing, comes from God and should lead us back to God. It is the same with knowledge. If we investigate the secrets of nature and do not make of them a ladder which helps us to climb towards our Creator, we turn the natural order upside down and inevitably fall backwards. We can gain by our labours a mastery over the hidden forces of nature. If we do not use them to benefit humanity, but to destroy those of our brothers whom we call our enemies, we are worse than Cain. Science which does not serve goodness is worse than barbarism. The latter has very few instruments of destruction at its disposal. When science rebels against sound idealism, however, and makes itself absolute, it can destroy all that we have inherited of beauty and goodness throughout the centuries.

2. The supremacy of goodness over knowledge has to be admitted in practice as well as in theory. It is useless and even harmful for us to be courageous if we are not also good. Very often knowledge is like a weapon in the hands of a child. If the child is naughty or careless he can do a great deal of damage

with his weapon. Before everything else we must be good. We must have that Christian goodness which embraces all the virtues and culminates in the love of God and of our neighbour. Once we have acquired this goodness, science will benefit by it. It will become a powerful means of enlightenment rather than of destruction. It will no longer be mere knowledge; it will be wisdom. It will teach us how to live and show us our proper destination. In short, it will become an instrument of virtue which will contribute enormously to the welfare of the human race.

3. Science is too easily glorified today. But knowledge for the sake of knowledge does not lead us to God and is very often stupidity or worse. It can be an instrument of evil and of physical and spiritual destruction. This is why St. Paul wrote: *Let no one rate himself more than he ought, but let him rate himself according to moderation, and according as God has apportioned to each one the measure of faith.*¹ *Knowledge puffs up, he said, but charity edifies.*²

“The humble knowledge of oneself,” *The Imitation of Christ* tells us, “is a surer way to God than deep researches after science. Knowledge is not to be blamed . . . but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred. But because many take more pains to be learned than to lead good lives, therefore they often go astray.”³ So let us learn everything which our position in life requires of us, and as much besides as we are able. But above all let us learn to be good and holy. If we fail in this, the rest is useless and dangerous.

¹ Rom. 12, 3.

² 1 Cor. 8, 1.

³ Bk. I, C. 3.

9th March

THE OBEDIENCE OF JESUS

1. Many people are anxious to be in a position to give orders, but very few wish to have to obey them. This is because there

are so few humble men and so many who love to make a display. The moral of the Gospel in this regard is completely opposed to worldly standards. The Gospel shows us how the Word of God came down from the glory of Heaven in order to become man like us and to live for thirty years subject to Mary and Joseph. He became, moreover, *obedient to death, even to death on a cross.*¹ *Therefore God also has exalted him and has bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.*² If we wish to follow Jesus, we must not aim at seeming important, but at becoming humble. We must not seek to command, but to obey. Then we shall also be taken up into the glory of God the Father, where we shall be rewarded for our humility and obedience. If we are placed by Divine Providence in a position of authority, let us accept it as a cross, as St. Pius X did when he was elected Pope. But let us remain essentially humble. Let us give orders pleasantly and gently, and act sternly only when it is absolutely necessary.

2. Obedience is an universal rule, without which there could be no harmony in the world. All creatures obey the laws of nature laid down by their Creator. The sun rises in the east, moves along its accustomed path everyday and every season, and sets in the west. The stars never leave the orbit arranged for them by the hand of God. The waves of the sea toss about when disturbed by the strength of the wind, but they fall back again without ever crossing the boundaries which God has set for them. Man alone dares to rebel against his Creator and against those who represent God on earth. Man alone dares to repeat the blasphemous cry of Satan: "I will not serve!" Remember the example which Jesus has given us. Although He is God, the lord and master of heaven and earth, He condescends to obey Mary and Joseph, two creatures incapable of achieving anything without Him. He *was subject to them.*³ Let us learn from

Him how to obey willingly and humbly. *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*⁴

3. It is easier to practise the virtue of obedience when we remember that all power comes from God. Then we can see Him in those who have authority over us. This will prevent us obeying orders from secondary motives, such as the desire to please men or to avoid punishment. We shall be able to obey solely for the purpose of doing our duty and pleasing God. Many think that it is easier to command than to obey. They are mistaken. Anyone in authority has grave responsibility before God and men and can sin seriously as well. The man who is obedient to his lawful superiors in the name of God, however, can never go wrong. Reflect on the following exhortation of St. Paul, which still holds good in our times. *Slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ; not serving to the eye as pleasers of men, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart, giving your service with good will as to the Lord and not to men, in the knowledge that whatever good each does, the same he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is slave or freeman. And you, masters, do the same towards them, and give up threatening, knowing that their Lord who is also your Lord is in Heaven, and that with him there is no respect of persons.*⁵

¹ Phil. 2, 8.

² Phil. 2, 9-11.

³ Luke 2, 51.

⁴ Mt. 11, 29.

⁵ Eph. 6, 5-9.

10th March

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF JESUS

1. It is an amazing thought that Jesus, the eternal wisdom of the Father, should have chosen to live quietly for thirty years in a carpenter's workshop along with his supposed father Joseph. He could have confounded the philosophers of Greece and Rome

with His infinite wisdom. He could have attracted crowds by His miracles and drawn the attention of the whole world. But He preferred silence and a busy hidden life. Why? Because men needed to learn one thing before anything else. It was a simple thing, but difficult to practise. It was humility they needed to learn, for humility was to be the foundation of the giant structure which He had come to raise up and whose spire was to reach to Heaven. If this edifice, the Church, was to be so high, its foundation would have to be very deep. Let us learn this lesson of humility and silence from the hidden life of Jesus.

The tendency in modern times even in regard to spiritual projects, is to try and draw attention and admiration. Perhaps this is why these projects are so often unsuccessful. Like the seed thrown by the sower upon the hard ground, they wither away because they have no moisture.¹ Without humility a great deal of noise can be made, but nothing supernatural is achieved. The first lesson we must learn from Jesus is the silence and recollection of the interior life.

2. Jesus chose to be an ordinary workman. He had power over the angels of Heaven, over the sun and stars of the firmament, over the waves of the ocean and over all the elements. By a single act of His divine will He could multiply loaves and change water into wine. Yet He elected to earn His living by the sweat of His brow. In His times the artisan was held in low esteem and was very often a slave. Manual labour was regarded as sordid and undignified. Christ wished to sanctify manual work by His own toil. He wished to teach men that in the eyes of God the hoe is as valuable as the pen. There is no difference between driving a plough and wielding a sceptre as long as a man is fulfilling his duty for the love of God. The only thing in this regard which is displeasing to God is laziness and inactivity. Anyone who leads an idle life at the expense of others is breaking God's law, which commands everybody to work. Let us follow the example of Jesus the worker. Let us avoid idleness, which

is the father of vices and is opposed to the command of God.² Let nobody claim that there is no need for him to work because he has enough money to last him all his life. There was far less need for Jesus to work in order to live, yet He chose to work as an ordinary labourer. If we do not have to work for our own sakes, let us reflect on how much need there is for us to work for others and for the glory of God. If justice does not compel us, charity does. It makes very little difference whether a man goes to hell for lack of justice or for lack of charity.

3. There are many who complain that their work is degrading or heavy or unsatisfying. This is an indication that they are working for themselves rather than for God. We should sanctify our work by prayer. We should meditate on the example of Jesus and remember that there are many sins for which we must make reparation. If we offer our work to God, it will not only become meritorious, but much easier. To work purely for profit is avarice, to work for the good opinion and praise of others is vanity; and to work in order to pass the time is a waste of time. The perfect Christian approach is to work in order to do our duty, to please God, to atone for our sins and to gain Heaven.

¹ Cf. Luke 8, 6.

² Cf. Gen. 3, 19; 2 Thess. 3, 10.

I Ith March

THE GROWTH OF JESUS

1. We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that *Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men.*¹ Jesus as God was the infinite wisdom of the Father and could not, therefore, advance in wisdom. He was eternal and could not advance in age. He was the source and giver of grace, so could not make progress in this regard. As man, however, Jesus wished that the external development of all His powers should correspond with

his advance in age. He wished to display His wisdom and holiness in a gradual manner. He did this in order to set an example. The life of a Christian should be a gradual advance towards God, towards wisdom and holiness. *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*² Every true Christian aims at making constant progress towards perfection. The imperfect must correct their failings and master their evil inclinations. The lukewarm must try to be more fervent in prayer and good works. Those who are good must try to be better. Those who are holy must go on increasing in sanctity.³

2. It is impossible to stand still in life. This is true whether we are speaking of the natural or of the supernatural. Life is motion and activity; there can be no cessation. In the natural order life begins in the womb and passes through the various stages of infancy, adolescence, maturity, and old age. The supernatural life begins in Baptism, matures in Confirmation, and is made entirely holy in the Eucharistic union with Jesus. But if this life begins to fail, the result can be everlasting ruin. It is true that in His infinite goodness Jesus has provided the Sacrament of Penance for those who fall and extinguish in themselves the supernatural life of grace. The sacrament of Penance has been instituted for their salvation. At the hour of death, moreover, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction heals the scars of sin and soothes the worn-out body with a refreshing ray of the spiritual life. But woe betide those who abuse God's gifts! If anyone repeatedly rejects His favours and appeals, instead of advancing in goodness he will be engulfed in the languor of spiritual death.

3. Like Jesus, we must advance in goodness before men as well as before God. Our external behaviour should be the candid mirror of our inner sanctity. The external appearance of courtesy, good manners and holiness should not be mere ostentation. It should be a vital expression of interior goodness, which naturally tends to show itself outwardly so that *all may see your good works*

and give glory to your Father in heaven.⁴ If it is no more than a display, Jesus will say that *they have received their reward*.⁵ If it is pure hypocrisy, Jesus will drive away the culprits from Himself because they are *like whited sepulchres*.⁶ Let us make Jesus our constant model, therefore. Let our outward demeanour reflect always our interior goodness and holiness.

¹ Luke 2, 52.² Mt. 5, 48.³ Cf. Apoc. 22, 11.⁴ Mt. 5, 16.⁵ Cf. Mt. 6, 1-5.⁶ Cf. Mt. 23, 27.

12th March

DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD

I. It is very difficult to detach ourselves from worldly affairs and remain always united to God. Nevertheless, St. Ignatius of Loyola often exclaimed: "How ugly the earth seems when I look towards Heaven!" The Saints saw the things of this world in the light of God. They recognised how insignificant this world is beside the infinite splendour of God. They realised that earthly things cannot satisfy the human heart nor assuage the restlessness of the soul which was created for God. We, on the other hand, become too attached to worldly goods. It may happen that our hearts become absorbed in them. Let us reflect on the unimportance of this world. There are myriads of stars in the firmament, many of which are far larger than our earth or sun. Some, like Andromeda, are 250,000 light-years distant from us; others, like the Triangle, are 280,000 light-years away, while still others are probably much farther. All obey exactly the plan of their Creator. How tiny our earth is by comparison! How insignificant we ourselves are! Why should we become so attached to the things of this earth? God alone is great. He alone should occupy our minds and hearts. We have been made for Him alone.

2. This is not the same as saying that we should have no interest in worldly affairs. Far from it. It is our duty to think about them and make provision for the future. We cannot and should not look for miracles from God. We may have obligations to ourselves or to our family or to our position in life. We are in this world to work, not to surrender to apathy or inactivity. We must engage in worldly activity in so far as our circumstances demand it. Nevertheless, our hearts should not be engrossed in earthly things, for they belong to God. In the midst of our other preoccupations we should adore, love and thank God, the Giver of every good, our Creator and Redeemer.

3. St. John Bosco said that we should work as if we never had to die. But we should also be as detached from worldly things as if we had to die in one hour. A man who works like this can accomplish wonders, because he is not working for himself, but for God. We should work and pray with our feet on the earth and our minds in Heaven. We should seek God, not ourselves, in everything which we do. Let us remember that one moment in Heaven is worth infinitely more than all the pleasure, love, and vanity of the world.

13th March

PRAYER

1. What is prayer? It is not simply a request for some favour or grace. It is much more than this. It is a raising of the mind and heart to God in order to adore, praise, love and appease Him. It is an intimate conversation with God, or with Our Lady, or with any of the Saints. It is wonderfully consoling to be able to place ourselves quietly in the presence of God and open our hearts to Him. We can make known to Him our

weaknesses, our desires and our resolutions. We can tell Him how much we long to love Him and to do His will in all things. We can tell Him how much we need His grace, because we are incapable of achieving anything without Him. We can tell Him that we long to love, adore and serve Him and to lead others to do likewise. If we pray in this fashion, we can be sure that God will hear us. If He obliges us to wait for an answer, it is because He wishes to test our faith and love. Even during such a period of trial, our prayers will still reach the throne of God.

2. The Saints loved to pray. Prayer was the source of their strength and consolation. They prayed with enthusiasm and for as long as they were able. They would have liked to spend their lives in intimate conversation with Jesus. They loved God so much that they lived and worked only for Him. For this reason they regarded prayer as a pleasure. The hours of prayer passed like seconds because love does not feel the passing of time, nor does it notice discomfort. Our Lord gave us an example of this in His own life. When He prayed to His Heavenly Father, *He continued all night in prayer to God.*¹ In spite of the fact that He was God, He gave Himself in prayer to His Heavenly Father before He worked any of His miracles, and in Gethsemane before He went to His Passion. It must be the same with us. A man who does not love prayer does not love God. If anyone works without praying, his work is useless. We should feel the need to pray just as much as we feel the need of God's assistance. The happiest hours of our lives should be those which we spend in prayer.

3. The saints had their failings and temptations like everybody else. Some experienced continual spiritual aridity. Others, like St. Anthony and St. Benedict, were often tempted against purity, while St. Francis de Sales was strongly inclined towards impatience. Others, like St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, were even tempted to despair. But they all conquered by means of prayer. If we wish to conquer in the same way, we must pray,

too. Let us never tire of praying. Sooner or later the Father of goodness and mercy will answer us.

¹ Luke 6, 12.

14th March

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

1. Our Lord warned His disciples that *they must always pray and not lose heart*.¹ But how is it possible to pray always? One might decide that this command was intended for monks and hermits dedicated to the contemplative life, and not for men living in the midst of the daily preoccupations of the world. But this is not so. Properly interpreted, Christ's precept holds good for everybody. We must pray always in the sense that we must remain always united to God in mind and heart. *Whether you eat or drink, or do anything else*, says St. Paul, *do all for the glory of God*.² *Whatever you do in word or in work*, he repeats elsewhere, *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*.³ In other words, whatever we are doing, even if it is something very simple like eating or drinking, we should do it in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God. Once we understand it in this way, the Gospel precept transforms all our actions into prayer. The spirit of prayer should accompany us everywhere. In all our actions and conversations, no matter how far we may travel, we should remain close to Jesus. One brief act of attentiveness to God, repeated from time to time, is enough to change all our actions and our entire life into a continual prayer.

2. The alchemists of old were searching for a legendary stone which would transform metal into gold. This stone does not exist, of course, but in the supernatural order the spirit of prayer really can change everything to gold. When they are accompanied by this spirit, all our actions are most pleasing to God

and draw His further favours. Blessed Maria Assunta Pallotta understood this truth clearly and put it into practice in her life. She tended animals, served in the kitchen and was a missionary in China, but no matter what she was doing she was moved by the spirit of prayer and of the love of God. "I ask God," she wrote to her parents, "to spread throughout the world that purity of intention which consists in performing our most ordinary actions for the love of God." Let us follow this example. Let us put into practice this great rule of the spiritual life. Then all our actions will be an acceptable prayer ascending to God.

3. The spirit of prayer is the spirit of the love of God, and this should inspire all our vocal prayers. Flowery petitions are no use if our minds and hearts are turned away from God. God wants our hearts. This is why He complained that *this people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*⁴ Remember the apt expression of St. Augustine: *To pray is to love.* Whoever loves God well prays a great deal. A man who is lacking in love prays very little. A man who does not love God at all never prays, or if he does he recites coldly the usual formulae and disregards Christ's warning: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*⁵ Let us pray often, but let our prayers be sincere acts of the love of God coming from the heart.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

² 1 Cor. 10, 31.

³ Col. 3, 17.

⁴ Mt. 15, 8 ; Mark 7, 6.

⁵ Mt. 4, 7.

15th March

PRAYER AS A NECESSARY MEANS OF SALVATION

1. St. Augustine calls prayer "the key to Heaven". We should acknowledge the infinite goodness of God in giving us such an easy means of salvation, for when He gave us prayer He gave us the key to His kingdom of Heaven. He invites us earnestly to pray. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find;*

*knock, and it shall be opened to you.*¹ *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.*² *Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation.*³

When Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, His Apostles became tired and sleepy. He rebuked them gently and asked them for the second time to pray that they might not yield to temptation. He makes this request of us also. We grow weary and apathetic as the Apostles did, while the devil is busy with his evil suggestions and the dangers of the world surround us. We have constant need of the grace of God to prevent us from falling. Let us pray fervently and bear in mind the advice of St. Alphonsus: "If you give up praying, you will certainly be damned."

2. "The man who prays will be saved, the man who does not pray will be damned." This reflection occurs in much the same words in the writings of St. Theresa, of St. Alphonsus, and of other masters of the spiritual life. There is no suggestion that prayer alone without sincerity of purpose, the Sacraments and good works, is sufficient for salvation. What is meant is that anyone who does not pray cannot possibly be saved except by a miracle, because God does not normally give His grace to anyone who does not ask for it. Even though the soul has grown indifferent and submerged in sin, if it does not abandon the habit of praying it will sooner or later be overcome by remorse and will turn again to God. St. John Chrysostom teaches us that it is impossible for anyone who prays fervently and constantly to fall and remain in serious sin. Let us pray, therefore. Let prayer be our constant support in every situation and in every action. If we remain close to God, we are assured of salvation. As long as we remain united to Our Lord, His grace will pervade our souls. But if we sever this bond of prayer with God, we shall be alone and helpless and shall fall into sin. This has been the sad experience of many before us.

3. We should appreciate how necessary it is to pray with

special fervour and perseverance in times of great temptation and suffering. If we neglect to do so when temptation assails us, we shall be on our own and shall certainly fall. When we encounter suffering and everything seems to be crumbling around us, let us remember that God sees us and pities us. Let us turn to Him, Who alone is able and eager to help us in our misfortunes. When we pray, our tears are precious in His sight. God's love for us is infinite. If we have recourse to Him, He will certainly answer us in the manner which He knows is best for us. He has promised this. *If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.*⁴

¹ Cf. Mt. 7, 7; Luke 11, 9.

² Cf. John 16, 23.

³ Cf. Mt. 26, 41; Mark 14, 38.

⁴ Ex. 22, 26.

16th March

HOW WE SHOULD PRAY

1. When Jesus asked us to pray, He promised to answer our prayers. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you.*¹ *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.*² God cannot break His promises. Why, then, do our prayers often remain unanswered? There are several reasons, but the main one is that which is pointed out by St. James. *You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss.*³ Some people say a few prayers with their lips only, but without any real faith or confidence that they will be answered. Jesus told the heartbroken father who begged Him to free his son from an evil spirit: *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*⁴ Then He healed the unfortunate boy. It is necessary to have complete confidence if we wish our prayers to be answered.

Other people ask for worldly favours without ever giving a thought to their spiritual welfare. But Jesus taught us to act

otherwise. *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given to you besides.*⁵ There are those who look for favours, such as bodily health or riches, which could lead to their spiritual destruction if they obtained them. Sometimes God delays His answer in order to test our faith and perseverance. It is important that we should pray with a right intention, with faith and perseverance, and with resignation to God's will. We must realise clearly that God will grant us whatever is best for us at the most suitable moment.

2. We must pray with deep humility as well. Once again we find that the Man-God Jesus has given us an example. In Gethsemane He fell prostrate on the ground and begged that, if it were possible, the bitter chalice might be taken away from Him. Immediately He added with full submission to the will of His Heavenly Father: *Yet not my will but thine be done.*⁶ Let us remember, moreover, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The former appeared to be full of virtue, but he was proud and was rejected. The latter recognised in all humility that he was a poor sinner, and he was exalted. *Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*⁷ *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*⁸ *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal.*⁹ When we kneel down to pray, therefore, we should make an act of humility. We are poor beggars, as St. Augustine puts it, before the throne of God. Let us pray with confidence in God's goodness, but also with a proper realisation of our own helplessness. Then God will take pity on us.

3. Finally, our prayer should be persevering. Perseverance in prayer is always rewarded by God, especially during times of temptation. The Gospel is full of examples of the way in which perseverance is rewarded. Remember the blind man of Jericho, who was rebuked for his persistent entreaties. Nevertheless, he went on shouting: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*¹⁰ His prayer was eventually answered. Remember the Centurion.

Although he was a pagan, he requested the cure of his paralysed servant with such outstanding faith and perseverance that Jesus granted what he asked. *Not even in Israel*, said Jesus, *have I found such great faith*.¹¹ Remember the parable of the three loaves which were so persistently demanded in the middle of the night until they were at last obtained.¹² Remember Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and the Samaritan woman. Remember Jairus, and the man suffering from dropsy. Above all, remember the Canaanite woman who almost snatched a miracle from the hands of Jesus by her humility and perseverance. A confident spirit of perseverance always wins the heart of God, Who sometimes waits before answering our prayers in order to enkindle our desire, to make us pray more, and to reward our perseverance by a liberal bestowal of His favours. So continue to pray with confidence, humility and perseverance, and God will certainly answer.

¹ Mt. 7, 7.² John 16, 23.³ James 4, 3.⁴ Mark 9, 22.⁵ Mt. 6, 33.⁶ Luke 22, 42.⁷ Luke 14, 11.⁸ James 4, 6.⁹ Ecclus. 35, 17.¹⁰ Cf. Luke 18, 35-43.¹¹ Luke 7, 9.¹² Cf. Luke 11, 5.

17th March

THE CONSOLATION OF PRAYER

1. *How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest in which she puts her young—your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God! Happy they who dwell in your house! continually they praise you.*¹

It is in these colourful words that the Psalmist expresses his longing for the house of God, where he can retire to pray and find comfort for his soul. The Saints also found happiness in long hours of prayer before their Creator. Any consolation which

the world can give us is shadowy and elusive compared with the peace which God gives those who, in the greatness of their faith and love, shut out all thought of earthly things in order to kneel before His tabernacle and converse with Him. If we need consolation, let us look for it before the altar. Only there will our unlimited desire for true and lasting peace find satisfaction.

2. We can gain strength and comfort from prayer especially when we are tempted and in danger of yielding to sin. God may not answer us immediately, because He may wish to try our faith and love. But if we persist and tell Jesus that we would die rather than offend Him, He will take pity on us. He will stretch out His hand as He did in the storm-tossed boat with the Apostles and over us also there will come a *great calm*.² Any sacrifice on our part is amply repaid by the peace which follows victory over temptation. Let us not be afraid. Let us pray, and God will console us.

3. There are moments when we are overcome by a very deep sadness. It may be an illness, the result of which could be death or inability to work. Perhaps it is an insult or calumny which has crushingly humiliated us. Or perhaps it is some sin into which we have fallen so seriously that we are close to despair. Somehow, our cross seems too heavy to bear. It is now that we are in special need of prayer. We can find peace and resignation. God is infinitely good and loves us with a fatherly love. Let us turn confidently to Him. If we pray with humility and perseverance, we shall be comforted.

¹ Ps. 83, 1-5.

² Mt. 8, 26 ; Mark 4, 39 ; Luke 8, 24.

18th March

PRIVATION

1. We must all experience privation, because everybody has to do without something in this life. Some people are never

in good health. Besides their actual sufferings, they have to put up with their inability to work or to enjoy themselves. Others have no means of earning their livelihood. Their lives are a daily battle not merely against poverty but against squalor and wretchedness. They have not enough bread to eat, nor have they homes where they and their families can live. In families where there is no such want, on the other hand, there may be no peace in the home. Individuals, too, can lack peace of soul, because they are ridden by false ambition or jealousy. Other people have a plentiful supply of this world's comforts, but are destitute of the most necessary thing in life, which is goodness. They are depressed because they have become slaves to sin.

Is there any remedy for all these privations and sorrows? Yes; we must embrace our cross. We must turn confidently to God and ask Him that we may be resigned to doing without those temporal things of which we are deprived. We must ask Him for the grace to rise from our sins and climb towards Christian perfection. There is no use in revolting nor in despairing. There is no real happiness in this world. If we are vexed and rebellious, our cross grows heavier. If we accept privation from God's hands, we are soon consoled.

2. Not only did the Saints accept necessary privations with loving submission to God's will, but they imposed voluntary mortifications on themselves. Some of them were rich and gave everything they had to the poor. Some were in positions of esteem and honour and went away to look for humiliation and obscurity. Many scourged themselves, slept on hard boards or on the bare ground, wore chains or hairshirts upon their bodies, and did without food in order to give it to the poor. They imitated Jesus in these things. He also chose to be poor and fasted for forty days in the desert. He was mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns and burdened with a heavy cross. When He was dying for us upon the cross, He asked for a drop of water to slake His thirst and was given vinegar and gall. We have a

great lesson to learn from the privations and sufferings of Jesus and of the Saints. If we are not heroic enough to go in search of voluntary want and suffering, we should at least accept fully the necessary privations and sorrows of this life.

3. Suffering and want can raise us to great moral heights. A man who knows how to do without worldly things shows his superiority over them. A man who knows how to deny himself for the love of God and offers his sufferings to Him is raised to a higher plane of unity and friendship with God. A man who strips himself of vanity becomes humble. A man who denies himself sleep and food becomes temperate. A man who refuses to give free play to pride and anger becomes patient and gentle. A man who restrains his bodily appetites when they threaten to dominate him purifies his soul and grows nearer to God. When we cheerfully accept the sufferings and privations of this life from a supernatural motive, we are preparing ourselves for the everlasting happiness of Heaven.

19th March

ST. JOSEPH

1. If it is true that the importance of his God-given role upon earth is the measure of a Saint's greatness, then with the exception of Mary none is greater than St. Joseph. He was chosen by God as the head of the Holy Family, as the most chaste spouse of the Mother of God and the foster-father of Jesus Christ. The Word Incarnate, the Lord and King of Heaven and earth, was obedient to Him, as was the Blessed Virgin, the holiest of creatures. He lived for thirty years in the company of Mary and was the chaste guardian of her virginity and divine motherhood. He had the privilege of clasping the holy Infant to his breast and of providing

by his labour for the needs of Him whose omnipotence causes the corn to sprout and brings forth the many fruits of the soil. In this regard St. Joseph is greater than any of the Angels, for none of them was ever entrusted with such a sublime mission. For this reason we should love him in the same way as he loved his most chaste spouse, Mary, and his foster child, Jesus. Knowing that he will certainly protect us, we should entrust all our cares and needs to him.

2. Joseph is described in the Gospel as a *just man*.¹ Perfect justice, such as St. Joseph possessed, is directed towards God, ourselves and our neighbours, and embraces in itself all the other virtues. A pious tradition claims that he was born wealthy, as well as being from a royal stock, but he distributed his goods among the poor and for the greater part of his life worked as a humble carpenter. He loved silence and obscurity. His only aim in life was to please Jesus and His Blessed Mother. It is believed that he was confirmed in grace from the moment of his birth and that when he reached the use of reason he consecrated himself to God by a vow of perpetual virginity. He was always peaceful and hardworking and never complained about his position in life. Even when grave misfortunes overtook him, he endeavoured to do God's will from the simple motive that this was what God wanted. We have a great deal to learn from this tremendous Saint. Let us love him, pray to him, and imitate him.

3. Let us turn to St. Joseph in times of necessity. He is very powerful, because his blessed Spouse will refuse him nothing, and the Son of God loves him with the love which a son has for a father. He worked for Jesus and Mary all his life and endured hardship, danger and exile for their sakes. He loved them as nobody else in the world ever loved them. It is impossible that he could be denied the favours for which he asks and which we should request him to obtain for us. Let us go to him trustingly, but let us remember that the surest way of being

heard by him is to imitate his wonderful virtues, especially his humility, his spirit of prayer, his purity and his calm desire always to do God's will.

¹ Mt. 1, 19.

20th March

THE PATRONAGE OF ST. JOSEPH

1. St. Joseph has been proclaimed Patron of the Universal Church, as he was Patron and Head of the Holy Family from which the Church developed. Devotion to St. Joseph has increased greatly in recent centuries, so much so that nowadays his name is always linked with the names of Jesus and Mary. St. John Chrysostom had already spoken of St. Joseph with the utmost veneration. He interpreted the expression "just", applied to Joseph in the Gospel,¹ as indicating the synthesis of all the virtues. At a later date St. Bernardine of Siena wrote in praise of the power and holiness of St. Joseph and roused the faithful to an increased devotion to the Holy Patriarch. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus had great devotion to him and claimed that she invariably received any favour for which she asked through his intercession. Many other Saints had the same experience. We also should have recourse to Saint Joseph in our spiritual and bodily necessities. St. Joseph had to endure a great deal in order to provide for the wants of the Holy Family and to protect them from the many dangers which threatened them. For this reason he is especially attentive to requests of any kind, as long as they are made with a lively faith and submission to the Will of God.

2. St. Joseph is the universal Patron of the Church. We who are loyal children of the Church should invoke his special intercession, therefore, for the triumph and expansion of the Kingdom of God upon earth. It is a sad but certain fact that in every age the Church is subject to persecution in some part

of the globe. There is always some nation, and often many of them, where the Church is obstructed in her mission for the salvation of souls and for the true welfare of society. Sometimes She is compelled to fight hard for her existence with the weapons of the spirit. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful before God . . .*² Sometimes the Church is in bonds and the blood of her martyrs is poured forth to become the seed from which new Christians will spring. There is no reason for surprise at all this, for Christ Himself foretold it quite clearly. *If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also . . .*³ but *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*⁴ If we are loyal sons of the Church we should pray that She may triumph. We should ask for the special intercession of St. Joseph, Her heavenly patron.

3. We shall have particular need of the protection of St. Joseph at the hour of death. He had the most beautiful of deaths, for Jesus and Mary were by his side. All his life he had lived only for them. He had worked for them, worried about them, and loved them. In the end he was able to see them near him, his own sweet Jesus and his beloved Spouse. His must have been a very peaceful death. He had fulfilled his mission and Jesus and Mary were there to console him in his last agony. We shall come to the end of our lives as well, perhaps sooner than we imagine. Let us ask the Holy Patriarch for the favour of a happy death. Let us ask him to ensure that Jesus and Mary will help us also when we are leaving this world.

¹ Mt. 1, 19.² 2 Cor. 10, 4.³ John 15, 20.⁴ Mt. 16, 18.

21st March

CHARITABLE WORKS

1. Christianity is the religion of love. This is not to say that charity is sufficient without justice, for there can be no real charity without justice. But justice cannot always bring us very

far. There are many complex and tragic problems which justice alone is powerless to solve. Only Christian love can comfort the human heart and heal some of the deeper wounds of poor suffering humanity. There is a sense in which it is true to say that Christianity is charity. This is what Jesus meant when He said: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*¹ *God is love and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*² Anyone who is without charity is not really a Christian. Egoism is the absolute negation of Christianity. The egoist is deaf to human sorrows and loves only himself. A Christian should love God above all things and his neighbour as himself.

2. When Jesus was asked what was the first commandment, He replied: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than this.*³ As St. Augustine says, the love of God and the love of our neighbour are two branches of the same tree, the tree of charity. *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, St. John warns us, he is a liar.*⁴ We must prove our love for God by showing charity towards our neighbour. All men are our brothers in Jesus Christ, Who has redeemed us by His precious blood. Our Lord has said that He will regard as done for Himself anything which we do for the least of our brethren.⁵ Like the Saints, we should see Jesus Himself living in the poor and suffering. The Saints gave Him everything they had, not only their possessions, but also their toil and love. Think how much those missionaries do who leave everything in order to go to foreign lands and win souls for Christ. Think of the charitable work of the sisters and nurses in the hospitals, asylums and orphanages. What are we doing?

3. As well as the corporal works, there are the spiritual works of mercy. Everyone is not obliged to undertake the former;

they would be impossible, for instance, for the destitute. But everyone is obliged to undertake the latter. Sometimes a kind word is more valuable than money. There are many ways in which we can carry out the spiritual works of mercy. There is the well-timed and understanding advice we can give to others; the visit to a sick man who is alone in his sufferings; the friendly and encouraging visit to an unfortunate prisoner; the tactful and patient instruction we can give to those who have gone astray through ignorance rather than through malice; and at times the rebuke we can administer to a hardened sinner in such a way as to make it quite clear that our only motive is to win him back to the real happiness which only goodness can give. Remember, however, that the practice of the spiritual works of mercy does not excuse us from the exercise of material works of charity whenever that is possible for us.⁶

¹ John 15, 12.² 1 John 4, 16.³ Mark 12, 30-31.⁴ 1 John 4, 20.⁵ Mt. 25, 40.⁶ Cf. James 2, 16.

22nd March

OUR TEMPERAMENT

I. Just as every man has his own individual physical characteristics, he also has his own peculiar disposition. It is our character which distinguishes us and makes us what we are. Our basic temperament is neither good nor bad in itself. It is a physical and spiritual disposition which can equally well impel us towards virtue as towards sin. No two people are exactly alike in character, but it is possible to divide them all into four main categories. It is a rather artificial classification, of course, since everyone shares to a greater or less extent in the attributes proper to each of the categories.

We can broadly distinguish (1) the sanguine, (2) the nervous,

(3) the choleric and (4) the phlegmatic type. People belonging to the first category are jolly folk, lively and intelligent and often impetuous. They are easily incited to begin aiming at a good or a bad objective, but usually they lack constancy and tenacity of purpose. Very often they fling themselves enthusiastically into an enterprise, but abandon it for want of perseverance. In the second category the nervous system is developed to an exceptionally fine degree in comparison with the other parts of the human organism. These people are sensitive rather than active. In their stable moments they can accomplish a great deal in a very short time. But they are easily discouraged. They are subject to depression and suffer a lot, sometimes purely as the result of a disordered imagination. They need sympathy and understanding. The choleric characters are impulsive and passionate. They have tremendous strength of will, but this needs to be restrained and diverted into the right channels if it is not to overflow into all sorts of excesses. The phlegmatic, on the other hand, are dull and apathetic by nature. They never hurry. They never get excited. They are cold, calculating and lacking in enthusiasm. But they are masters of themselves and if they are intelligent and capable they can do a great deal of work with the minimum effort and emerge successfully from the most difficult situations. It is very helpful for a man to study and become acquainted with his own character so that he may be able to form it as he ought.

2. There is a theory that it is impossible to form character, because our character is and always will be what nature has given us. "*Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.*"¹ ("You cast out nature with a pitch-fork, but only until such time as it comes back again.") Montaigne and Rousseau extended this idea of Horace to the extent of holding that it would be evil as well as superfluous to attempt to shape character, which should be what nature intended it to be. Although there is some little truth in this opinion, fundamentally it is false. It is true that nature

cannot be suppressed, but it can be shaped and improved by a sound and well-directed education. Our natural temperament can be compared to an uncultivated field covered with weeds and bushes, or to a horse which is still untamed and unaccustomed to labour. It abounds in hidden energies and unregulated instincts; it is dangerous to leave it to itself. It would become, as Dante puts it, "a large forest, wild and rough".² So it is necessary for character to be formed under the guidance of a good teacher and subject to the wisdom and grace of God.

3. Each one of us is obliged to train his own character properly. Above all, it is necessary to know ourselves as the result of meditation and examination of conscience so that we may be able to correct and change our temperament. This kind of formation is slow and difficult, but we must overcome difficulties patiently and perseveringly. There is no need to be discouraged. Our main requirement in the battle against our evil instincts is the grace of God for which we should pray fervently. We need an enlightened spiritual director who will guide and encourage us. Finally, we need the determination to succeed, without which the grace of God cannot achieve the Christian transformation of our character.

¹ Horace, Ep. I, 10, 24.

² Inferno, I, 5.

23rd March

THE CHRISTIAN FORMATION OF CHARACTER

1. Our temperament is often a burden to ourselves and can at times be the source of great annoyance to others. If we do nothing about it, it can be the cause of failings or of extremes of behaviour on our part which we bitterly regret afterwards. It is necessary, therefore, to form character in accordance with Christian principles. We are in no danger of losing our individu-

ality by training our character in this way. God's grace does not change nature, but elevates and improves it. It is like a shoot which we plant in the uncultivated soil of our own being. The first fruits may be sour, but after a while they grow sweeter, while still preserving the essential taste and aroma of the mother-plant. St. Jerome was a headstrong and austere character, and he continued to be so even after the grace of God had transformed him and made him holy. But his rugged nature was at the same time softened and strengthened by divine grace. St. Augustine had a great intellect and a great heart. When he abandoned philosophical sophistry and worldly vanity in order to dedicate these gifts to the service of God, he achieved a profundity of thought never before attained by Christian wisdom. We should behave in the same manner. If we are hot-tempered, we should convert this tendency to anger into hatred for sin. If we are enthusiastic by nature, we should turn our enthusiasm into love for God and for our neighbour. If we are high-spirited and energetic, we should devote ourselves to good works for our own salvation and to the apostolate for souls. How far have we advanced in the Christian transformation of our character? Let us examine our progress and resolve to do better.

2. St. Francis de Sales writes as follows with his usual simplicity: "A way has been found of making bitter almonds sweet, by puncturing them at the bottom and squeezing out the juice. Why cannot we eject our evil inclinations in order to make ourselves better? There is nobody so good by nature that a bad habit could not altogether corrupt him. Similarly, there is nobody so bad by nature that he could not be trained in goodness by the grace of God and his own perseverance." St. Francis de Sales did not teach this in theory only, but he put his advice into practice to an heroic degree in his own life. He was endowed by nature with a vigorous and resentful disposition, and he became an angel of gentleness and affability. From his youth he was aware of the defects in his character. He himself admitted

that he struggled against them for twenty-two years with God's help. He reached the point where he was able to remain silent when he was insulted and to refrain from defending himself when he was slandered, for he had acquired an inward peace and a remarkable calmness of manner. This gentleness of character enabled him to convert over seventy thousand heretics, to win back hardened sinners to Jesus Christ, and to set countless souls on fire with the love of God. We have a great deal to learn from him.

3. When Jesus offered Himself as our Divine Model, He used these words: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*¹ Humility and gentleness are essential attributes of the Christian character. Whoever does not succeed in acquiring them is building upon sand. He will be a torment to others as well as to himself. Jesus indicates this also, for after He has said: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart,* He adds: *and you will find rest for your souls.*² In other words, He tells us that it is only on this condition that we shall find spiritual peace. When we have modelled our character on His humility and gentleness, we shall be inflamed with the love of God and of our neighbour. Only then shall we have succeeded in acquiring a character which is genuinely and deeply Christian.

¹ Mt. 11, 29.

² Ibid.

24th March

THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

I. Every day in the lives of the Saints was a continual act of the love of God. This was how they became holy. They loved God intensely all the time. They loved Him above all things. Everything which they thought, desired or did was directed to Him. Their entire lives were consecrated to Him. We should all desire to be holy; if we do, we must love God with our whole

heart, strength, and will. Not until then will every action of ours become meritorious. Holiness is born of the love of God. Without the love of God everything is futile and useless; our conversation is so much idle chatter; our desires are empty dreams which excite us for a while and then dissolve like bubbles of soap; our actions are unprofitable and our enterprises are not aimed at a true objective; our achievements can inflate us for a time but they will leave us disillusioned at the hour of death. The love of God is necessary for us. He alone is entirely worthy of our affection. Other loves are passing, but this love is eternal. Other loves confuse and trouble us, but the love of God gives us peace of soul. Other loves weaken and vanish with time, but the love of God is the source of all holiness in this life and of eternal happiness in the next. Why, then, do we not forget our worldly preoccupations? Let us give our hearts to God for ever, and we shall be in possession of the one true happiness which never fades.

2. The love which we have for God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Benefactor, should not be merely sentimental. It must be effective. When love is sincere, it is active. It is not enough to say: I love You, O my God. We must show by our actions that we love Him. *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus tells us, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven.*¹ Our love must be active, therefore. Moreover, we must avoid and detest sin, because it is an offence against God, and we must strive to become holy. This involves sacrifice, but sacrifice is the touchstone of love. Anyone in love is not afraid of sacrifice; in fact, he looks for it in order to prove his love. Charity, like faith, is a lifeless thing if it is not accompanied by actions.² We must love God by doing everything for love of Him. God will repay us generously, not only in the next life but even in the present. Even on earth, the only real happiness is that which comes from Him.

3. As has been said, love must be active and effective as well as coming from the heart. This is still not sufficient, however. Love tends towards an intimate union with the person loved and does not rest until this union is achieved. This is the unity of love. The Saints reached this high level of charity. They lived in God, and were permanently united to God as if they formed part of His Being. *It is now no longer I that live*, exclaimed St. Paul, *but Christ lives in me.*³ If only we could succeed in achieving such a complete and lasting union with God, any sacrifice would seem easy and we should certainly grow in sanctity.

¹ Mt. 7, 21.² Cf. James 2, 17.³ Gal. 2, 20.

25th March

MORTIFICATION AND PENANCE

1. In Christian teaching death is the beginning of life. *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, Jesus said, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his life in this world keeps it unto life everlasting.*¹ This paradox of dying to this life in order to live in Heaven was enacted in a wonderful way in the lives of Jesus and of the Saints. It must be put into effect in our lives also if we are to be genuine Christians. Jesus shed His precious blood for us, and His death was the beginning of His triumph. The Apostles, Martyrs, and Saints gave their lives for Christ and received as their reward the happy and eternal life of Heaven. By dying to our own ego and to our passions, we shall find the true life of Christ. We must die to ourselves so that Christ may live in us as He lived in St. Paul. We must die to pride so that Christian humility may live in us; we must die to anger so that patience may live in us; we must die to lust so that purity and

innocence may live in us; and we must die to selfishness so that charity may live in us.

2. Our Lord reiterates many times the command to do penance. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*² He even insists on penance as a necessary condition for salvation. *Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner.*³ It is a stern command, and it may even seem cruel to some. Why does the infinitely good God, who is our loving Father, wish us to impose penances and sufferings on ourselves? The answer is simple. God makes us suffer and do penance because He knows that it is necessary for our salvation. It is because He loves us and desires our welfare. Mortification and suffering are necessary for two reasons. They are particularly necessary because we are all sinners and must expiate our sins. Secondly, they are necessary because without penance and suffering we become attached to this world and forget all about Heaven, which is our real home. In His love for us, therefore, God commands us to do penance. The Saints were gluttons for penance and mortification and went as far as imposing on themselves sufferings which horrify us today. What are we doing in the way of penance? Let us remember the command of Jesus: *Unless you repent, you will all perish.*⁴

3. There are many simple acts of mortification which we can all do for our spiritual welfare. For example, we can remain silent when there is no need to speak; we can deprive ourselves of dainties at table; and we can act humbly when our pride is hurt or patiently when we think we have been offended. These are easy ways in which men of good will can practise mortification. But there are times when we must be ready, like the martyrs and the Saints, to make heroic sacrifices rather than offend God. When we are tempted, for example, we must be determined even to die rather than fall into sin. Let us think about this and strengthen our resolutions.

¹ John 12, 24-25.

² Mt. 4, 17.

³ Luke 13, 3.

⁴ Ibid.

26th March

WHY GOD CREATED US

1. God is infinitely happy in Himself from all eternity. He contemplates His own Essence, which contains every beauty and perfection. In the inconceivable joy of this contemplation He generates the substantial image of Himself which is the Eternal Word, *the brightness of his glory and the image of his substance*.¹ When He contemplates Himself in the Eternal Word, He naturally loves Himself. This substantial and infinite Love proceeds from God as an eternal principle in so far as He knows Himself, and thence proceeds from the Father Who contemplates and the Word Who is contemplated. In this mysterious circle of the divine life God enjoys an eternal infinite and perfect happiness. Consequently, He is not in need of anything. Nevertheless, He wishes to radiate even outside of Himself the splendour of His power, beauty and goodness. He created the world and placed Man in it as the sovereign being. Unfortunately, sin came to disturb our being and to deprive us of the splendour of divine grace, and in this way it weakened the sovereignty which God had given us over all other creatures. But Jesus, the Eternal Word made man, has raised us once more to the supreme dignity of sons of God and heirs of Heaven. These reflections should arouse immense gratitude to God on our part, because He gave us life and made us masters of the universe. They should also make us deeply grateful to Jesus, because in His infinite mercy He raised us up after we had fallen and redeemed us with His precious blood.

2. We should ask the reason for everything which comes from the hands of God. Have you ever seriously considered why you are in this world? It is certainly not for the sake of this passing earthly existence, for the sake of earning your living or enjoying yourself. You know well that the passing pleasures of this life

do not satisfy the human heart and cannot be the final goal of life. Each one of us has a thirst for all that is infinite, eternal and perfect. God alone can satisfy this thirst. Just as we are created by God, so we are created for Him. Just as we came from God, so we are gradually travelling back towards Him, for He is the final goal of our earthly journey. We should meditate on this great truth, which we were first taught in the Catechism, namely, that we were created to know, love and serve God on this earth and to be happy with Him for ever in Heaven. Let us not allow ourselves to be dazzled by earthly beauty. God alone is the eternal beauty which will satisfy our hearts.

3. If we are to reach God, Who is our goal, it is necessary for us to know, love and serve Him. Everything speaks to us of God, from the blade of grass to the cedar of the Lebanon, from the insect which glows in the darkness of the night to the highest stars of the firmament. In the hidden depths of our own being we hear His voice. The more we grow in the knowledge of God, the more we feel the need to love Him. We see how so much beauty, goodness and power is alone worthy of all our love. As our Creator, Redeemer and Benefactor, God has the right to the undivided affection of our hearts. This love should not be empty and sterile, however; it should be active and effective. Knowing and loving God, we should feel the obligation of serving Him as our Master in whatever He commands, even when this demands a heavy sacrifice on our part.

¹ Heb. 1, 3.

27th March

THE HUMAN SOUL

1. The human body is one of the most wonderful things which God has created. Unlike the bodies of most animals, it does not bend towards the earth, but stands up towards the sky, in the

direction of our true heavenly fatherland. It communicates with creation outside it by means of the five senses. It has contact with other bodies, as well as a way of making use of them, when the opportunity arises, by means of the sense of touch. It has the sense of taste to distinguish between different flavours and to act as a guide to its sustenance. The sense of smell enables it to experience perfumes and to avoid unhealthy odours. By means of hearing and speech it can communicate with other people, understand their ideas and express its own, as well as listen to the wonderful music of creation. Lastly, there is sight, the most astounding of the senses, which helps us to see in earthly things an enchanting reflection of the eternal beauty of God. The scientist is lost in admiration at the perfection of the human body, and if his science is also wisdom he should exclaim: This is the hand of God! Nevertheless, in comparison with the greatness of the human soul, the perfections of the body are quite insignificant. The soul is like a breath of the Divine Spirit and a ray of the Divine Wisdom. It is a simple, spiritual and immortal being which bears in itself the image of God. Unlike the body, it is not tied to this earth, but can soar high above it by means of its faculty of thought. It can investigate the secrets of God's own nature and is also capable of immense love. We should indeed be grateful to God for His infinite goodness.

2. Consider that you have only one soul, which belongs entirely to God and has Heaven for its true home. God has given you two hands, two feet, two ears and two eyes, but He has given you only one soul. What a disaster if you should lose it, for you would then be damned for ever! When God made you to be free, He placed your fate in your own hands. *When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice.*¹ Remember that the salvation of your soul is the most necessary work which you have to do. It is more precious to you than gold or silver. *More precious than gold is health and well-being, contentment of spirit than coral.*² All our attention should be

devoted to keeping our soul free from sin and endowing it with every virtue.

3. Remember that every mortal sin means death to the soul, for it robs it of the supernatural life of grace, making it incapable of every good action and deserving of hell. If you committed one mortal sin, God could tire of you as if you were an unproductive tree and put an end to your life without giving you time to repent. Then you would be lost for all eternity. This thought should never leave your mind, particularly in time of temptation. At such a time turn to God with confidence, tell Him that you love Him and do not wish to offend Him at any price. Face death rather than sin.

¹ Ecclus. 15, 14.

² Ecclus. 30, 15.

28th March

CONSCIENCE

1. Conscience is the inner judgment of the soul which keeps us in full conformity with the law of God and the precepts of the Church by indicating the principles in accordance with which we should act from moment to moment. Unfortunately, this judgment is not always enlightened and sincere. Some people become so broad-minded that they appear to have no conscience at all. In their vocabulary sins become mere acts of folly, scruples become melancholic tendencies which ought to be ignored, and our natural weaknesses become necessary handicaps of nature which we can do nothing to overcome. As a result, they join their disorderly pleasures and sins of every kind with the practice of their religion. They imagine that they will be able to compensate for their offences against God by their false and superficial

sanctimoniousness. But Jesus tells us: *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹ Moreover, He has given us a law to be observed and has instituted the Church to interpret God's law and to lay down for us specific standards of behaviour, Our Lord said of His Apostles and their successors: *He who hears you, hears me.*² He warns us that it is not enough to cry: *Lord, Lord! but it is necessary to do the will of His Father Who is in Heaven.*³ He warns us, moreover, that *everyone who hears these my words and does not act upon them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house on sand.*⁴ We must form a reliable conscience in ourselves with the help of the Church's teaching and the advice of a good Spiritual Director. Then we must earnestly put its dictates into practice.

2. There is such a thing also as a scrupulous conscience. Some people live in continual anxiety and torment. They see sin everywhere and believe it is impossible to avoid it. In spite of the clear directions of their confessor, they postpone receiving Holy Communion because they feel unworthy. They say their prayers over and over again because they feel that they are saying them badly. They become a burden to themselves and to others. They never stop worrying and waste their own valuable time as well as that of their confessor. The spirit of Jesus, however, is a spirit of peace, forgiveness and truth. He is infinitely good and merciful and wants us to have complete confidence in Him and in the ministers of His Church, which He founded as a sure guide for our salvation and spiritual happiness. People who are troubled by a scrupulous conscience should go to a good confessor or Spiritual Director and strictly obey his instructions. The only cure for scrupulosity is absolute obedience.

3. There are some people who have a right conscience, a conscience, in other words, which is based on the principles of the Gospel, on the precepts of the Church and on the sound advice of a good confessor. Nevertheless, these must remember St. Paul's warning: *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest*

*he fall.*⁵ They must not grow proud like the pharisee who prayed in front of the altar, but must be humble like the poor publican who knew that without God's direction and grace he would fall into serious sin. They should remember, too, that it is not enough to have a right conscience, but its dictates must be put into practice with the help of fervent prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments.

¹ Mt. 5, 48.² Luke 10, 16.³ Mt. 7, 21.⁴ Mt. 7, 26.⁵ 1 Cor. 10, 12.

29th March

JESUS LOST IN THE TEMPLE

1. The Gospel of St. Luke relates that when Jesus was twelve years of age He went with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pasch. When the feast was over, Our Lady and St. Joseph set out on the return journey and, as was the custom, they went in separate caravans, one being for men and the other for women. Each believed that the Child Jesus was in the other group, but at the end of the first day's journey they failed to find Him in either. They were stricken with worry and sorrow and returned immediately to Jerusalem where they searched anxiously for Him. At last they found Him in the Temple. There He was carrying on a discussion in the midst of a gathering of doctors of the Law, who were amazed at the wisdom of His answers. When the Blessed Virgin gently reproved Him, Jesus replied: *How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*¹ After this He went back readily with them to Nazareth "*and was subject to them.*" We have a great deal to learn from this chapter of the Gospel. Above all,

let us learn the humility and mildness of Jesus, Who quietly replied, in answer to Mary's gentle reproach, that it was His special mission to look after the work of His Heavenly Father, for He owed obedience in the first place to God and then to men.² What is our attitude when we are rebuked or criticised? Are we humble in the manner of Jesus Christ? Or are we angry and resentful? Let us earnestly examine ourselves in this matter.

2. Now let us reflect on the anguish of Mary and Joseph over the loss of Jesus. They had no peace as long as they could not find Him. They set out immediately on the difficult return journey to Jerusalem and searched anxiously for three days. They did not rest until they had found Him at last. Unfortunately, we also lose Jesus whenever we commit sin. Our Lord dwells in our souls by His grace, but if we sin seriously the devil takes possession. We know well that the devil is a cunning tyrant. He entices us by every means in his power to give free play to our passions, and then leaves us in a state of bitterness and remorse. Sometimes he oppresses us to the point of desperation. If ever we should fall and lose the grace of God, let us repeat immediately the words of the prodigal son: *I will get up and go to my Father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.*³ Like the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, let us go immediately in search of Jesus, Whom we have lost. We shall have no peace until we have found Him. We also shall find Him in the Temple, for we shall find Him in prayer, in the tribunal of Penance and in Holy Communion.

3. When we have found Jesus at last after we have lost Him by sin, let us implore Him never to permit us to lose Him again. Let us ask Him to let us die rather than offend Him again. Perhaps we have given expression to these prayers and resolutions on previous occasions. But let us not lose heart. Let us remember that in order to test their love and perseverance Jesus allowed Joseph and Mary to search for Him for three days, in spite of their sorrow and their fervent prayers. Let us look for Him

in the same spirit of love and perseverance, and we shall find and keep Him for ever.

¹ Cf. Luke 2, 41-51.

² Cf. Acts 5, 29.

³ Luke 15, 18.

30th March

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. God sees us always, for He is everywhere. *In Him we live and move and have our being.*¹ We did not exist, and He produced us from nothing, by His omnipotence. If He did not support us continually, we should return to nothingness, for conservation is a continuous act of creation. But He has given us immortal souls, and has created us for Himself so that we may serve, enjoy and love Him for all eternity. We are always in His presence. He sees clearly everything which we think, desire or do, even our most secret hidden actions. Do we perfectly grasp this tremendous truth? Are we aware of it at every moment of our lives, and do we make it the guide for our conduct? If we were to live continually in the presence of God, our lives would be angelic rather than human, for we would not allow ourselves to commit even the slightest sin nor to be guilty of the least thought, word or action which might offend Him. The more we fail in our awareness of the presence of God the more disordered our actions become. Let us resolve, therefore, to live continually in the presence of God and to direct all our thoughts, desires and actions towards Him.

2. In times of temptation it is especially necessary for us to place ourselves in the presence of God. We are courting disaster if we do not raise our minds and hearts to God to implore His help when temptation assails us. Like the Apostles on the lake of Genesareth when their frail boat was battered by the storm-

tossed waves and was in danger of being wrecked, let us cry out with the same faith and confidence when we are assaulted by the devil: *Lord, save us! we are perishing!*² God knows our weakness and will certainly have mercy on us. Let us not lose courage if He seems to be slow in granting His enlightenment and His grace and leaves us prey to the onslaughts of our passions. Like the Canaanite woman in the Gospel, let us continue to pray with constancy and with faith, and the merciful God will take pity on us at last.

3. A man who lives always in the presence of God cannot sin. When we find ourselves in the presence of a high-ranking worldly personality, do we dare to behave any other way but correctly and respectfully? How should we dare, then, to behave in any other fashion in the presence of the infinite majesty of God, our Creator and Redeemer, Who will one day also be our Judge? Could He not in a single instant snap the thread of our mortal life and call us before His judgment-seat even while we are in the act of offending Him? Let us remember St. Paul's stern warning: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*³ Let us remain always in the presence of God and we shall be at peace and strong in His grace.

¹ Acts 17, 28.² Mt. 8, 25.³ Heb. 10, 31.

31st March

ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT

1. It is wrong to imagine that Christianity is a sad and gloomy religion. Quite otherwise, it is the religion of joy, of the real joy, that is, which comes from God, from the serenity of a sound conscience and from the hope and sure expectation of the immeasurable happiness of heaven after the trials of this world

are over. Other pleasures are passing and often leave behind disillusionment, boredom and remorse. The happiness of living a sincere Christian life does not vanish even in the midst of suffering, for it bestows an inner peace which nothing else can give. *The kingdom of God, says St. Paul, does not consist in food and drink, but in justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*¹ *The fruit of the Spirit, he says in his letter to the Galatians, is charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness . . .*² St. John the Apostle, writing to the faithful of his time, encourages them to be joyful with the joy which comes from Jesus Christ. *These things we write to you that you may rejoice, and our joy may be full.*³ It is not contrary to Christian teaching to indulge in lawful recreation and amusement. If a bow is drawn too tight, it snaps. Our physical constitution demands that after our work we should rest. Resting does not mean idleness and inactivity, but suitable recreation and entertainment. God Himself set aside six days for working and one for repose. This day of solemn repose, however, should be dedicated in a particular way to God by the fulfilment of the obligations which the Church prescribes. But there is no question of our being forbidden to refresh ourselves mentally and physically on this day by suitable entertainment.

2. Sport and amusement are particularly necessary for youth. Young people are full of life, and their exuberance must have an outlet. It is true that there are privileged souls, such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. Dominic Savio, whose natural exuberance is completely channelled into the love of God and of their neighbour. But such people are rare. Normally, young people need entertainment and sport. Sport has made tremendous progress today. Far from being evil, this is an excellent development. If these forces of vitality were not diverted into athletic activities, they would probably find an outlet in other more dangerous pursuits. However, as our late Holy Father, Pius XII, often explained in his audiences for sportsmen, it is necessary

that bodily exercises should be joined with those which are spiritual. Just as the body must be trained intensively to succeed in athletic competitions, so the will must be trained by means of daily sacrifice and self-denial to achieve victory over our unruly inclinations. This victory is eventually won by the grace of God and brings a far higher happiness than athletic conquests could ever give us.

3. Unfortunately, there are forms of amusement which are not lawful, either because they are sinful in themselves or because they present a grave danger to the soul. Certain uninhibited kinds of dancing, for example, can aim at arousing the basest instincts of the human organism. There are beaches where the healthy pastime of bathing is made only an excuse for indecent and exciting exhibitions. There are parties and receptions, moreover, at which we know well that we shall be subjected to serious temptation. All such places and occasions should normally be avoided. It is the wise advice of spiritual writers that we should always aim at uniting our amusements and recreations to goodness of thought and conversation. Moreover, we should often detach our minds from our worldly entertainments and think of the realities of Heaven.

¹ Rom. 14, 17.

² Gal. 5, 22.

³ 1 John 1, 4.

APRIL

1st April

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD¹

1. The Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the most profound mysteries of our religion. It is a mystery of infinite goodness and mercy that, out of love for fallen humanity, the Eternal Word of God should have assumed a human form and become man in order to show us the way to Heaven and to enable us to reach it. Jesus came amongst us to instruct us, to call us to perfection and to give us an example and the necessary help. But He did much more than this. He came also to bear the weight of our offences and to offer Himself as a spotless victim of love and suffering in expiation of our sins. All this seems too great a mystery, almost inconceivable, in fact, until we consider that the charity of God is as infinite as His nature. This is why the Saints experienced hours of ecstasy contemplating the passion and death of our Divine Redeemer. Whenever St. Gertrude looked upon the figure of Jesus nailed to the Cross, she could not restrain her tears. She was accustomed to say that God was specially merciful towards those who meditated on the passion and death of Jesus. St. Bernard writes that even as the rocks were rent asunder at the death of Our Redeemer, so our sin-hardened hearts should feel as if they were breaking when we meditate on His sufferings. Let us meditate, therefore, on the passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are sinners,

as unfortunately we all are, we shall be moved to weep for our sins. If we are imperfect and lukewarm, we shall be set on fire with love and with a determination to requite as far as possible the infinite charity of Jesus Christ.

2. The Crucifix is a simple meditation manual, open and intelligible to all, even to the most illiterate. Anyone who turns to it can study the sorrowing gaze of Jesus, His heart pierced with love for men, His head crowned with thorns, His hands and feet transfixed with nails which support His divine body, streaming blood and writhing in anguish. The Crucifix should be dear and sacred to every Christian. It should stand at the head of his bed, hang around his neck, and hold a prominent position in his place of work or study.

Above all, however, the Crucifix should have its place in the heart of every fervent Christian. At every moment of his life, in times of sadness and of joy, he should remember that God became man and suffered and died for him. He should remember also that this implies an obligation on his part to work, suffer and die for the love of God. Many people meditate on the Crucifix. They kiss it and claim to love it. But while they love the Crucifix, they have no love for their own particular cross, which they try by every means in their power to fling far away from them. Now, it is quite certain that anyone who does not love his own cross does not really love the Crucifix, for Jesus has told us that *if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*²

3. "Meditation on the passion of Jesus," writes St. Albert the Great, "is more profitable than fasting on bread and water or than scourging ourselves." This is because when we meditate with love and gratitude on the passion of our Redeemer we have the experience of being transformed and set aglow with charity. We realise the truth of St. Paul's words: *The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to*

*come that will be revealed in us.*³ Let us cast ourselves, therefore, into the merciful arms of God and be prepared to suffer everything, even death, for the love of Jesus.

¹ This meditation and those which follow it are best suited to Passiontide and Holy Week.

² Mt. 16, 24.

³ Rom. 8, 18.

2nd April

THE ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM AND THE LAST SUPPER

1. Imagine the joyful and triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The cheering crowds line the street along which He approaches, riding upon the foal of an ass. Palm and olive branches are waved aloft, while groups of children cry out: *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*¹ In the midst of all this exultation Jesus appears to be absorbed and detached. In his representation of this scene a famous artist painted a large cross in the distance, far beyond the cheering crowd. The divine vision of Jesus certainly saw this cross. He knew that in a few days He would be arrested as a malefactor and crucified between two thieves. The ingratitude of men towards the divine Redeemer was to go even to this length. We also shall have our moments of happiness and of victory in life. But, like Jesus, we must not trust too much in the joys and conquests of this world. The warning of the Holy Spirit that *the end of joy may be sorrow*² is, unfortunately, only too true. Earthly happiness lasts for a short time and ends in grief. So we must seek the true and lasting happiness which comes from divine grace and from constant

conformity with the will of God. This happiness will never pass away, but will become everlasting in Heaven.

2. The evening before Our Lord was arrested and put to death, Judas was negotiating His betrayal for a handful of money. Peter was about to deny Him in public and the Apostles would abandon Him in the hour of trial. Jesus knew all this. He saw, moreover, how men would be forgetful of Him throughout the ages, and how they would insult Him and hate Him. Nevertheless, He resolved to remain amongst us for ever under the Eucharistic species. *I have greatly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.*³ Why did He say this? Because He was about to work the most amazing miracle of His infinite love, the institution of the Blessed Eucharist. He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to His Apostles, saying: *This is my body, which is being given for you.* Then He took the cup of wine, gave thanks to His heavenly Father and said: *This is the chalice of my blood, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you. Do this in remembrance of Me,* He said. There was nothing left for the infinite power and goodness of Jesus to give. He had given Himself, not only to His Apostles, but to all men throughout the ages. If we meditated deeply on this mystery of infinite love, we should certainly love Jesus very much. We should joyfully accept the nourishment of His immaculate body and should live with the supernatural life which comes from Him.

3. We may often experience the desire to be good and holy . . . But soon the trials of life, the impulses of passion, and the distractions of our daily business disperse these noble thoughts. We are caught up in the roundabout of life, immersed in mediocrity and, perhaps, in sin. Why should this happen? Because virtue is difficult, a prolonged martyrdom, in fact. We cannot find the strength to make this lofty ascent towards perfection.

It is necessary that Jesus, the divine food of the soul, should enter our poor, fallen nature. Then we shall be transformed and

shall be capable of anything. We shall say with St. Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*⁴

¹ Cf. Mt. 21, 9.

² Prov. 14, 13.

³ Luke 22, 15.

⁴ Cf. Gal. 2, 20.

3rd April

THE BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

I. Ingratitude is a very cruel thing. It imprints a deep wound on the human heart, and the heart of Jesus was infinitely more sensitive than ours. He had raised Judas to the high rank of the Apostolate; He had made him one of His closest friends and had entrusted him with the secrets of His infinite love. Now Judas betrays Him for the wretched sum of thirty pieces of silver. Worse is to follow, however. While Jesus is praying and perspiring blood at the thought of the ingratitude of men and of the nearness of His passion and death, the garden of Gethsemane becomes suddenly aglow with torches and reverberates with the shouting of the hired ruffians whom Judas has brought with him to arrest Jesus. The treacherous Apostle comes forward. He embraces our divine Redeemer, hails Him as his Master and greets Him with a sacrilegious kiss upon the cheek. Jesus neither repulses nor rebukes him, but with a gesture of infinite mercy He addresses him as a friend. *Friend, He says, for what purpose hast thou come?*¹ *Dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*² If only Judas could have heeded this last appeal and begged for forgiveness at Jesus' feet with tears of repentance! Jesus would certainly have taken him to His heart and returned his kiss with a kiss of pardon and divine friendship. Perhaps we have also stood at times on the brink of sin and have been aware of a higher appeal to go back. But have we heeded it? If ever we are in grave danger again, let us listen to this quiet voice which

speaks to our conscience. Let us fall on our knees before Jesus and earnestly implore Him: *Be not silent, Lord, be not far from me!*³ Let us ask Him to have pity on our weakness and to come to our assistance.

2. It is quite certain that Judas did not commit this sacrilegious act of betrayal on the spur of the moment. Evil, like goodness, is arrived at step by step. Perhaps it was some motive of self-interest rather than of pure love which led Judas to become one of Jesus' Apostles. Covetousness, *the root of all evils,*⁴ seems to have been his dominant passion. As the Gospel tells us, he kept the money offerings which those who had been converted gave to Jesus for His support and for that of His Apostles. He did not know how to suppress his dominant passion at times. On one occasion he complained about Mary Magdalen when she anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment. The passion grew and he became a thief. *He was a thief, and holding the purse used to take what was put in it.*⁵ In spite of the extraordinary graces he had received, he fell into sin. Finally, he was guilty of the betrayal, of the sacrilegious communion at the last supper, and of the kiss of hypocrisy in Gethesemane. The example of Judas is a lesson to us. It is disastrous to begin to yield to our passions and to fall into evil habits. The Holy Spirit warns us that anyone who makes little account of small things will fall into bigger.⁶ Let us remember that even a tiny spark can set off a conflagration. Likewise, a single mortal sin can lead us to Hell.

3. Failure to comply with the extraordinary graces which Jesus had granted him was responsible for the fall of Judas. Whoever receives a great deal must give as much. Judas had been called to the dignity of the Apostolate. At the Last Supper he received the fulness of the priesthood along with the other Apostles and received Jesus Himself into his soul under the species of the consecrated bread. In spite of all this he deserted and betrayed his Master. What about us? Let us consider how many spiritual and temporal graces God has bestowed on us

throughout our lives. Have we been thankful for them? If we have not corresponded generously with all these favours, or if we have done worse and have rejected them by sin, let us repent and resolve to do better. The example of Judas should teach us this lesson.

¹ Mt. 26, 50.² Luke 22, 48.³ Ps. 34, 22.⁴ Cf. 1 Tim. 6, 10.⁵ John 12, 6.⁶ Cf. Eccles. 19, 1.

4th April

JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

1. After the last supper, when Judas had disappeared in order to carry out his treacherous plan, Jesus walked with His other eleven Apostles among the olive trees of Gethsemane. He took aside three of the most faithful, and then went away a few paces from them and prostrated Himself on the ground in fervent prayer. Being God, Jesus had no need of prayer, but He wished to give us an example of how we ought to behave in moments of trial and danger. Three times He rose and went over to the Apostles, who were tired and had fallen asleep. He reproached them gently and exhorted them to pray. *Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*¹ We often have a similar experience. Temptation assails us from within and from without, and we remain unmoved and inactive. But how can we escape from danger without the help of God? The divine help comes to us from grace, which must be sought by prayer. The electric current ceases if the switch cuts off its contact with the source from which it is derived. In the same way the divine grace of which we are in constant need is cut off if we do not remain united by prayer to God, the source of the spiritual life. Let us learn from our divine model Jesus how to watch and pray always, especially in times of temptation and of peril.

2. What was the prayer of Jesus in the moment of anguish when He saw Himself abandoned or betrayed by everyone on this earth and foresaw the terrible sufferings of His passion and death which, despite His infinite love, would prove to be in vain for so many men? Face downwards upon the earth, He implored His Heavenly Father to take away, if possible, the bitter chalice. But He added immediately: *Yet not my will but thine be done.*² We should pray like Jesus, especially when we are suffering in body and tormented in mind. We should prostrate ourselves before God with an act of deep humility and of perfect confidence in His infinite goodness. We should pray first of all that His name may be glorified throughout the world as it is in Heaven. We should pray that His Kingdom may be established and may triumph over evil, and that our own souls may be saved along with those of our brothers in Christ. Then we can ask for the favours which we need in the present life and for freedom from physical and moral suffering. We can ask for all these things, certainly, but we should add with Jesus: *Yet not my will but thine be done.* In other words, we should be ready to offer up our sufferings as a proof of our love for Him.

3. In His sadness and loneliness Jesus is comforted by an angel. It is true that, being God, He was in no need of being consoled by angels. Moreover, He had willingly allowed Himself to be offered as a victim of expiation for our sins. *He was offered because it was his own will.*³ But He wished to be an example to us in this matter also. If we trustingly abandon ourselves to God's will in moments of temptation and of sorrow we shall receive comfort from our angel, too. How many times have we experienced this mysterious consolation in our souls? When we have bowed our heads in suffering and have offered ourselves as pure victims to God, we have felt an inner light and peace which only divine grace can give.

¹ Mark 14, 38.

² Luke 22, 42.

³ Is. 53, 7.

5th April

THE AGONY OF JESUS

1. While Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, His divine mind witnessed not only the torments of His approaching passion and death, but also the hatred of His enemies, both then and in later times, the ingratitude of His Apostles, and the countless sins with which men would repay His infinite goodness throughout the ages. He realised that He would be a sign of contradiction for many. Some would hate Him; others would desecrate His precious blood and His immaculate body. Many, forgetful of the Redemption, would commit sin after sin, while others would receive special graces and would return only coldness and indifference in exchange for such great love. Faced with this gloomy scene, Jesus was utterly dejected and was overcome by a mysterious, rending agony which caused Him to perspire blood. *He began to feel dread and to be exceedingly troubled.¹ And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly. And his sweat became as drops of blood running down upon the ground.²*

At that moment Jesus could see each one of us and all our wretchedness, coldness and sinfulness. If our hearts are not made of stone, let us weep for our faults and firmly resolve to improve.

2. Jesus suffered willingly and generously for us. First of all He endured this near-fatal anguish of soul which caused blood to ooze from the pores of His body. Then He suffered the cruellest of physical tortures. What must our reaction be? If we lack the heroic generosity of the Saints and are not prepared to look for suffering by scourging ourselves or by wearing hair-shirts or chains next to our flesh, let us at least accept our inevitable sorrows and trials with perfect resignation. Jesus was innocence itself, yet He suffered willingly for us. Why should we, who are unworthy sinners, be unwilling to submit to the punishments due to our sins? There are many who kiss the

Crucifix and claim to love it but try as hard as possible to reject the cross which God has given them. This is an impossible state of affairs. Let us remember that if we wish to have a sincere love for the Crucifix, we must love our own cross as well, for this is the cross which God has given us.

3. While Jesus was praying and suffering in the garden of Gethsemane and the Apostles were unconcernedly sleeping, a group of hired ruffians approached, led by the traitor, Judas. Jesus went to meet them and quietly allowed Himself to be fettered by these rascals. He could have struck them to the ground in an instant or, as He said Himself, called more than twelve legions of Angels to His defence.³ But this was the hour of the power of darkness. *This is your hour, and the power of darkness.*⁴ When the Apostles saw Him being bound and led away like an evil-doer, they deserted Him and ran away. *Then all the disciples left him and fled.*⁵ We also may have been guilty of shameful conduct on many occasions. Whenever God granted us the experience of His consoling presence by means of His grace or favours, we formed the most generous resolutions. But in the presence of difficulties or of bad example from others, we may have shamefully deserted Jesus. Let us reflect whether this is so and reinforce our good resolutions.

¹ Mark 14, 33.

² Luke 22, 43-44.

³ Cf. Mt. 26, 33.

⁴ Luke 22, 53.

⁵ Mt. 26, 56.

6th April

THE NIGHT OF THE PASSION

1. The night of the passion of Jesus Christ began in the garden of Gethsemane. Here the tired Apostles left Him to pray alone and to endure the agonizing prevision of the torments and death which awaited Him, as well as of the ingratitude with which

men would repay His infinite love. Soon afterwards, abandoned by everybody, He was led before the Sanhedrin as a criminal and a disturber of the public peace. Not only was the accusation false, but it was, of course, a complete inversion of the truth. Jesus had, in fact, taught the noblest and most elevating of doctrines for all humanity. He had proved the truth of His teaching by His miracles. He restored sight to the blind, health to the lepers, to the lame, and to the paralysed, and life to the dead. He had stated quite clearly: *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*¹ Nevertheless, in the presence of His wicked judges He showed Himself to be meek and humble. But when He was confronted with an obvious falsehood, He spoke out in defence of the truth of His teaching. For this He was struck by one of the High Priest's attendants, who said: *Is that the way thou dost answer the high priest? If I have spoken ill, Jesus replied quietly, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why dost thou strike me?*² Let us learn from our divine Redeemer to conquer self-love and to bear insults humbly and peacefully.

2. Caiphas, the High Priest, could not gather any solid and unconflicting evidence which would convict Jesus and further his own evil plans. At last he solemnly commanded Jesus in the name of the living God to say whether He was really the Christ, the Son of God. *Thou hast said it, Jesus replied: Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven.* At this the High Priest tore his garments. *He has blasphemed, he cried. He deserves to die.*³ The unjust sentence was met with general acclaim and Jesus was handed over to the soldiers as if He were a common criminal. For the rest of the night these ruffians humiliated and ill-treated Him in the worst possible fashion. Some spat in His face, others slapped and struck Him, and still others blindfolded Him and jeeringly asked: *Prophecy to us, O Christ! Who is it that struck thee?*⁴ Jesus suffered in silence. He suffered because of the blows and insults, but most of all

because of the sad spectacle of so much sin and ingratitude. He was offered as a victim of expiation for us all. When we realise the vast number of sins which are committed, what do we do about it? Do we pray that poor sinners may repent and return to console the heart of Jesus? Do we offer our pains and sorrows on their behalf? If we really love God, we should do this much.

3. Picture Jesus during this long and sorrowful night. Abandoned by everybody, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, unjustly judged worthy of death by the High Priest, buffeted and mocked by the soldiers, He suffers and prays and offers Himself as a victim of reparation, especially for all those sins which are being committed and will be committed by night all over the world. Let us bow before Him in spirit. Let us tell Him with penitent hearts that we shall never offend Him again and that we love and adore Him. Let us promise to offer the prayers and sufferings of this day in reparation for the sins which men commit under cover of darkness.

¹ Mt. 22, 21.

² John 18, 19-23.

³ Cf. Mt. 26, 63-66.

⁴ Cf. Mt. 26, 67-68.

7th April

PETER DENIES JESUS

I. St. Peter was by nature impetuous and generous. He loved Jesus sincerely. Even after the other Apostles had run away when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane,¹ he followed Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the High Priest's house. *Peter was following at a distance.*² In his generous enthusiasm, however, he depended too much on himself. During the last supper Jesus had foretold to His Apostles His approaching passion and death and their desertion. Immediately, Peter had solemnly declared that, even if all the others would be scandalised on the

night of the passion, he would never be scandalised. He would, he said, be ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death.³ But Jesus tried to put him on his guard against presumption. *I tell thee, Peter, a cock will not crow this day, until thou hast denied three times that thou knowest me.*⁴ In spite of this prophecy, the impetuous Apostle went as far as the courtyard of the High Priest. While the divine Redeemer was brought in chains before the judgment seat of the High Priest, where He was calumniated, struck and condemned to death, Peter was asked if he was a follower of the Galilean. Three times He denied his Master with oaths and protests. Unfortunately, this is what happens to anyone who trusts presumptuously in his own strength. This is what happens when we forget that we can do nothing, as St. Paul points out, without the help and the grace of God. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*⁵ Anyone is courting disaster if he foolishly places all his confidence in himself and neglects to seek the help of God when he is in danger. He is certain to fall.

2. While Jesus was praying and suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was asleep. He followed Jesus at a distance, admittedly, but he followed fearfully and slowly. Unfortunately tepidity is the first step towards falling into sin. A man who is lukewarm and does not pray will fall victim to the first assault. This is what happened to Peter. The same will happen to us if we do not preserve a bond of love and prayer with Jesus. At least after his first fall, Peter should have remembered Jesus' prophesy. He should not have continued to trust in his own strength and should have escaped from the occasion of sin. Instead of this, he remained in it. As a result, instead of falling only once, he denied his divine Master three times with oaths and protestations. Let us learn to flee from the occasions of sin. When we find ourselves in them, let us escape as quickly as possible. If our duty obliges us to face them, God will certainly give us the strength to overcome them as long as we humbly

ask for it. On the other hand, if we are imprudent about placing ourselves in danger we shall certainly fall. *He who loves danger will perish in it.*⁶

3. St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, was endowed with many gifts and graces. He was taught by Jesus for three years and had seen many wonderful miracles. Moreover, he loved His Master very much. If he could fall so wretchedly, we who are so weak and helpless should tremble at the approach of temptation. We should fly to Jesus without delay and tell Him that He may do anything to us if He desires, even take our lives, as long as He does not allow us to desert or to deny Him, nor to offend Him by any sin. The example of Peter's fall is a grave warning to us. It is a warning to us to be humble and persevering in prayer and to place all our confidence in God.

¹ Cf. Mt. 26, 56.

² Luke 22, 54.

³ Cf. Mt. 24, 33 ; Luke 22, 33.

⁴ Cf. Luke 22, 34.

⁵ 2 Cor. 3, 5.

⁶ Eccles. 3, 25.

8th April

THE REPENTANCE OF ST. PETER

1. Peter had denied his Master three times. He was standing in the courtyard of the High Priest warming himself before a brazier and not even thinking of the depths to which he had descended. Jesus, calumniated, struck and mocked as if He were criminal, forgets altogether about Himself. Moved by compassion for the leader of His Apostles, now become a perjurer, He turns His gaze towards him. Peter is jerked back to his senses by this look, which is at the same time stern and affectionate. He realises at last the level to which he has fallen. He is stricken to the heart and feels a sudden tightness in his throat. *And Peter went out and wept bitterly.*¹

Peter saw clearly at this stage the chasm into which he had

fallen. He thought of all the gifts and favours which he had received from Jesus and recalled the prophecy which his Master had made. *A cock will not crow this day, until thou hast denied three times that thou knowest me.*² He remembered also how he had sworn that he would never deny Jesus. Now he saw himself in the role of the prodigal son or the lost sheep . . . and as he wept bitterly he saw again the reproachful yet loving gaze of Jesus. His grief found an outlet in his tears and he was filled with confidence that Jesus in His infinite goodness would forgive him. If we should fall (as we often do, unfortunately), let us rise again immediately as Peter did. Let us weep for our sins and kneeling before Jesus, represented by the priest, let us confess our faults and tell God that we shall never offend Him again.

2. When Peter realised how wretchedly he had fallen, the first thing which he did was to escape from the occasion of sin. *Peter went out.*³ He grieved for his three sins not only on that sad night but throughout his life. St. Clement writes that he wept so often that his tears wore two deep furrows in his cheeks and that whenever he heard the cock crowing, the cry pierced his heart. He loved Jesus sincerely and passionately. When he was asked three times if he loved Him, he replied humbly: *Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*⁴ Can we say these same words to Jesus with equal sincerity and humility? If we really love Jesus as Peter did, and are prepared to face death for His sake as Peter was, then we may be sure that we shall never offend God again.

3. Two of the Apostles sinned seriously. Peter denied Jesus and Judas betrayed Him. Both regretted their offence, but Peter's was the repentance of love and that of Judas was the remorse of despair. Judas also admitted his fault. *I have sinned, he said, in betraying innocent blood.*⁵ He flung the thirty pieces of silver, which he received as a reward for his crime, into the temple. But he did not return to Jesus, Who had even called him His friend at the time of the betrayal. He did not trust in His infinite goodness, but went away in despair and hanged himself with a halter

from a tree. Let us adore the mystery of the providence and mercy of God, but let us remember that we are lost if we abuse it. Our next sin could be the last which we should have the opportunity of committing. If God did not grant us the grace to repent, we could end in the manner of Judas rather than that of Peter. Let us think earnestly about this and form new resolutions with sincerity and humility.

¹ Luke 22, 62.² Luke 22, 34.³ Luke 22, 62.⁴ Cf. John 21, 16.⁵ Mt. 27, 4.

9th April

JESUS BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD

I. After a night of extreme suffering Jesus was led in bonds before Pilate so that He might be condemned to death. The Jews were so determined to achieve this purpose that in a spirit of diabolical hatred they brought false accusations against Jesus. Our divine Redeemer knew well the deceitful hypocrisy of His accusers. He showed no resentment, however, but bore witness to the truth by His calm and brief replies. When He saw that it was useless to insist, He remained silent, so that even Pilate was astonished.¹ Let us study this scene and note the brutal hatred of the Jews on one hand and the divine humility of Jesus on the other. Let us consider how we behave when we are offended or calumniated. Perhaps we flare up and hit back proudly and sharply. This shows that we lack real humility and charity. *To him who strikes thee on the one cheek, Jesus taught, offer the other also.*² Not only did He preach this, but He also gave us the highest possible example. If anyone accuses or offends us, there is nothing to prevent us defending ourselves quietly and reasonably. We are not obliged to practise to the full the heroism of St. Francis de Sales, who remained silent when he was insulted and suppressed entirely his feelings of resentment. Nevertheless,

this is the ideal towards which we must tend. We should never speak in a moment of anger when wounded self-love is boiling up inside us. We should know how to make the sacrifice of remaining silent for the time being and thinking humbly about the matter before replying eventually in a spirit of Christian peace. We should follow the example of Jesus, Who said: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*³

2. Pilate was struck by the inconsistency and contradictoriness of the charges made by the Jews, and by the peaceful behaviour of Jesus. *I find no crime deserving of death in him,*⁴ he declared openly. In the face of this solemn declaration of Jesus' innocence, one would have expected to have seen Him released. Unfortunately, however, people do not always act in accordance with their express convictions. We have probably had this experience ourselves on many occasions. We have experienced the truth of Ovid's phrase: *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*⁵ We see, in other words, what is the better thing to do, but we are attracted by the more evil. We see what we should do in order to be humble, but we are proud in our behaviour. We see what we should do in order to be charitable, but we are selfish. We see what we should do in order to be just, but we behave unjustly. We see the way in which we should resist temptation immediately, and we hesitate instead and fall. We see that it is necessary to pray fervently, because by ourselves we are capable of nothing; yet we are weak and careless. Let us reflect and make serious resolutions which we shall certainly put into practice.

3. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, which was the homeland of our Redeemer. Herod was a cruel and sensual king. It was he who had given orders for the slaying of St. John the Precursor. Jesus had said no more than was necessary in the presence of Pilate, but He was completely silent in front of Herod, so much so that the king decided that He was mad and sent him away. Perhaps Jesus was silent because He did not believe that Herod was worthy of His reply. It will be a sad day

for us if Jesus does not speak in our hearts any more. Let us never make ourselves unworthy of His words and inspirations. Let us say with the Psalmist: *But not silent; Lord, be not far from me.*⁶ Without Jesus we are lost for all eternity.

¹ Cf. Mt. 27, 14.

² Cf. Luke 6, 29.

³ Cf. Mt. 11, 29.

⁴ Cf. Luke 23, 22; John 18, 38; 19, 4.

⁵ Ovid, *Met.*, VII. 20, 21.

⁶ Ps. 34, 22.

10th April

THE SCOURGING AND THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

1. Although Pilate had acknowledged Jesus' innocence, he condemned Him to be scourged in order to satisfy the hatred of the Jews. He was stripped of His garments and exposed to the gaze of the soldiery. As unseen angels bowed in adoration before His virginal purity, He offered Himself as an immaculate lamb in expiation of the countless sins of immodesty and of impurity by which men so often dishonour their immortal souls. When He had been tied to a pillar, the executioners approached Him with their whips and in quick succession rained blows upon His innocent body. Blow followed blow until His blood flowed freely and His flesh was laid bare to the bone. The prophet Isaias had vividly described this tragic scene centuries beforehand. *From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein; wounds and bruises and swelling sores.*¹ *Despised and the most object of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity. . . . 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. But he was wounded for our iniquities: he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we are healed.*² During these sufferings as during all that had preceded them, Jesus offered Himself in silence as a victim for our sins. If only His executioners could have read what was

in His heart, they would have seen how infinitely He loved them and would have flung themselves in tears at His feet. We who have been taught to understand the Gospel know well how much He loved us and how much He suffered for us. Let us adore Jesus, bruised for our sins, and let us kiss His wounds. Let us tell Him that we shall never offend Him again and that we desire to love Him with all the ardour of which our hearts are capable.

2. No order had been given that Jesus was to be crowned with thorns. It was surely the devil who suggested this idea to the soldiers. They had heard that Jesus had claimed to be a king, so for their own brutal entertainment they clothed Him in a purple rag and placed a rod in His hand as if it were a sceptre. Then they found a bundle of reeds with sharp thorns, of which they made a crown and placed it on His head, driving it into His flesh. One can imagine the pain and humiliation which Jesus suffered. Perhaps He desired by this new kind of torment to make reparation in a special manner for all the sins of thought—sins of hate and anger, of jealousy and impurity.

Let us adore Our Lord as He is mocked and outraged in this fashion. Let us proclaim Him as King of our hearts and Master of our entire lives. Let us assure Him that after all His sufferings on our behalf we cannot allow ourselves to go astray, for He has given us the fulness of His grace so that we may be transformed and made His for all time and for eternity.

3. When we are offended or insulted, let us remember the infinite patience of Jesus when He was scourged and crowned with thorns. If Jesus, Who was so innocent, suffered so much for us, should we not follow His example and endure with patience the hardships of life? We should be ready to forgive and pardon, to subdue our rebellious inclinations, to moderate our speech and remain silent when we are offended, to love our enemies and to do good to those who do evil to us. Let us recall the way in which Jesus was scourged and crowned with thorns

and we shall receive from Him the supernatural strength to follow His example.

¹ Is. 1, 6.

² Is. 53, 3-5.

11th April

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

1. Pilate was neither wicked nor cruel. He was a weak opportunist who placed his position as Governor of Judea and his own personal interests above everything else in life. He was prepared, moreover, to adopt the meanest of compromises. He had acquitted Jesus because he believed Him to be innocent. But he panicked as soon as he heard the crowd shouting and the Jewish priests accusing him of being no friend of the Emperor. Then he had recourse to an expedient. When he saw Jesus covered with blood, crowned with thorns and clothed in purple rags, he showed Him to the crowd in the hope that their frenzied hearts would be touched with compassion. He said only a few simple words. "Behold the man!" He wished them to see the condition to which this man had been reduced who had been accused and mocked by them. Looking like a trampled worm, He would stir up pity in every heart. In the crowd there were people who had been enchanted by the glory of His heavenly teaching. Some of them had listened to Him in Jerusalem only a few days previously when He was greeted by tumults of applause. Others had received favours and miracles from Him. But the good folk remained silent, for they could not summon up the courage to express any sentiments of gratitude or of humanity in that gathering. A roar drowned the words of Pilate. "Let Him be crucified!"

Sometimes when we see what is good and just, a rebellious impulse suddenly rises up inside us. Unfortunately, we may yield to it on occasion and stifle the higher inspirations which

we receive. Let us resolve never to be guilty of weak or unworthy conduct towards Jesus and to obey at all costs the dictates of a sound conscience.

2. Pilate now tried another manoeuvre to save Jesus without endangering his own position. It was a custom amongst the Jews to pardon a condemned criminal during the Paschal period. There was a notorious robber in prison at this time who had been guilty of sedition and murder. His name was Barabbas. Pilate hoped that the people would choose to release Jesus when they heard Him compared with Barabbas. But once again a ferocious outcry drowned Pilate's words. "*Release to us Barabbas!*"¹ They shouted out that Barabbas should be set free and that Jesus should be crucified. Let us be ashamed in the face of such wickedness. For we also yield many times to the onslaught of our passions and prefer Barabbas to Jesus. We prefer sin to innocence, and the satisfaction of our selfish nature to the sacred law of God. We do this in spite of the fact that we are aware that Jesus is our Redeemer and our God. We know well that by serving Him we shall conquer and that by placing all our confidence in Him our souls will find peace. We know that we can be happy only by loving Him and that we can be saved only by living and dying for Him. Nevertheless, we do not always choose Jesus.

3. Pilate's reply to the demands of the enraged mob was as weak as ever. "*Why,*" he asked, "*what evil has he done?*"² The crowd continued to cry: "*Let him be crucified!*" Then, as if he believed that he was making an honourable escape from his predicament, the Procurator washed his hands in public. *I am innocent of the blood of this just man,* he said. *See to it yourselves.*³ Jesus was condemned to death. When we are confronted by injustice or by sin of any kind, do we act with Christian strength of character or do we waver like Pilate in an effort to serve two masters, the devil and God? Let us remember that virtue demands sacrifice and, if necessary, even death. Woe to those who wash

their hands in a despicable attempt to evade their strict obligations to their fellow-men and fellow-Christians.

¹ Luke 23, 18.

² Mt. 27, 23.

³ Mt. 27, 24.

12th April

THE ROAD TO CALVARY

1. After having been condemned to death, Jesus is delivered into the hands of the Jews to be crucified as a malefactor. Two rough beams of wood are fixed together in the form of a cross and placed upon His shoulders. He is already worn out with suffering and has lost large quantities of blood as a result of the scourging and of the crowning with thorns. Jesus does not reject the Cross, but embraces it. He has come into this world to show forth His infinite love and to redeem us from our sins by His sufferings and death. In the garden of Gethsemane He has said with sublime resignation to the Heavenly Father: *Not my will but thine be done.*¹ The Cross is too heavy for His human strength, but what does that matter? He embraces it, takes it upon His weary shoulders and sets out for Calvary.

Perhaps we have often kissed the Crucifix with reverence and affection. Let us keep it hanging upon the walls of our home where we can gaze on it with love and hope. Let us pray before it in our moments of need. But what about our own cross? Do we love our cross as Jesus loved His? Do we embrace it as Jesus did? Do we bow willingly beneath the load as He did, and do we carry it with resignation and without useless complaints? It is not enough to love the Crucifix. We must love our own cross as well in silence and in prayer, knowing that only in this way can we imitate Jesus Who has said to us: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*²

2. Jesus walks towards Calvary, carrying His cross. With every step and with every jerk His wounds reopen and pour blood.

His shoulders, torn by the rough wood, are lacerated with unimaginable pain. In His exhaustion He stumbles many times, but He rises and takes up the cross again. How often do we complain of our cross and of God because He has given it to us? How often have we cursed it, or at least said to God in our prayers that the cross is too heavy and that we should like Him to give us a lighter one. . . . But this will not do. Everyone must carry his own cross, and nobody's else's every day of his life. If the load seems too heavy, let us look at Jesus. He Who is supremely innocent has carried His cross as far as Calvary. Why should we, who are sinners, not have to carry ours? Let us recall the teaching of the masters of the spiritual life, namely, that the only way of perfection is the way of the cross.

3. Jesus meets His most holy mother Mary on the road to Calvary. His divine gaze meets her motherly eyes as she looks upon her only son and her God. There is no word of comfort on either side, for their hearts fully understand one another. Mary knows that her son is the Redeemer who has come to save fallen humanity by His bloody death, and Jesus knows that, as the holy Simeon has foretold, a mystical sword must pierce the heart of His Mother, now become the Queen of Martyrs. Let us turn to Mary also in our moments of sorrow, especially when our cross seems too heavy for us. Our loving Mother will dry our tears and give comfort to our hearts.

¹ Luke 22, 42.

² Luke 9, 23.

13th April

THE CRUCIFIXION

1. After a painful and exhausting journey Jesus reaches Calvary, where He is to be crucified. Once again He is stripped of His garments, which by this time have become stuck to His swollen sores. Then He is stretched upon the wooden cross, to which one of the brutal executioners fastens His hands and feet

with blows from a hammer. The sharp nails are driven through His flesh into the hard wood. Jesus looks upwards and offers Himself in silence as a victim of expiation on behalf of His tormentors and of all of us. His mother Mary is standing a few paces away in the company of the holy women and of the beloved disciple. The blows of the hammer pierce the maternal heart of the Blessed Virgin, but she remains silent also and prays. When we have been afflicted by misfortune or sorrow and our hearts are racked with grief, how do we behave? Have we the resignation, the trust in God, and the spirit of prayer which Jesus and Mary had on Calvary? Let us remind ourselves that we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ. If Jesus, our Head, has suffered, how much more do miserable sinners like the rest of us deserve to suffer. Jesus wishes us to participate in the work of redemption by uniting our sufferings to His. *I rejoice now, says St. Paul, in the sufferings I bear . . . and what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ I fill up in my flesh . . .*¹ Let us face adversity with courage, therefore, and keep our eyes hopefully towards Heaven. Let us remember, as St. Paul also says, that even as we share in the sufferings of Christ, so we shall share in His triumph.² Jesus had to ascend Mount Calvary before He could ascend to Heaven. If we are to walk in His footsteps, we shall have to do the same.

2. When Jesus had been nailed to the cross and the executioners had dug a hole nearby, they lifted the heavy piece of wood and thrust it into the ground. The whole weight of Jesus' body was borne by His hands and feet, so that the shock caused the wounds made by the nails to become enlarged and sent an acute quiver of pain through His suffering members. He raised His glazed eyes towards Heaven and murmured a prayer of forgiveness and love. For three long hours Jesus hung suspended between earth and sky as a victim of reparation for our sins. His precious blood fell drop by drop from the wounds in His worn-out body. He gasped for breath in an ever-increasing agony, while His heart

throbbled with infinite love. He looked down and saw His most holy Mother and the beloved disciple. Having sacrificed everything for us, He desired to leave us the last precious possession which remained to Him—His Mother. He turned to her and then to the beloved disciple. "Woman, behold thy son," He said. "Son, behold thy Mother." We were all present in the person of St. John, and we were all entrusted to the loving maternal care of Mary. From that moment we were taken into her protection. Let us turn to her, therefore, in sorrow and in temptation. Let us be faithful to her during life and she will be always at our side, especially at the hour of death.

3. On either side of Jesus there were two other crosses, to which two robbers had been tied. When one of these saw how Jesus prayed and forgave in the midst of His sufferings, he was touched by the grace of God. He began to hate his crimes and sins, and to believe in the divine Redeemer. Turning towards Jesus, he begged for forgiveness. "Lord, he said, "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus returned his gaze at once and replied: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." This moving episode holds two main lessons for us. (1) No matter how great and numerous are our sins, God in His infinite mercy will forgive us if we sincerely repent, and resolve to lead better lives. (2) We should not, on the other hand, put off our conversion until the moment of death. As St. Augustine points out, only one of the two thieves is reported to have been converted. We are taking a grave risk whenever we abuse God's goodness and mercy.

¹ Col. 1, 24.

² Cf. 2 Cor. 1, 7.

14th April

THE DEATH OF OUR SAVIOUR

1. In the midst of His sufferings, Jesus forgets Himself and prays for His executioners. *Father*, He pleaded, *forgive them, for*

*they do not know what they are doing.*¹ Who were these people who crucified Him? We know well that they were not only the Jews, but all of us. The prophet Isaias had foretold this. *He was wounded for our iniquities: he was bruised for our sins . . . He was offered because it was his own will . . .*² We are all the crucifiers of Jesus, therefore. He willed to suffer and to die for all of us, and when He was hanging on the cross He begged for forgiveness for us all. This should incite us to trust in God and to repentance for our sins. We should be sorry for our sins because they were the real cause of the voluntary death of Jesus. We should have confidence in Him, because He forgave us when He was dying on the cross and is ready to pardon us again as long as we are sincerely repentant.

Let us consider how Jesus, even though He was derided and nailed to the cross, prayed for and forgave His executioners. How do we normally behave? Perhaps we fly into anger at the first word of offence or act of misunderstanding, or perhaps we nourish secret feelings of hatred in our hearts for our brothers in Jesus Christ? Let us kneel before the cross and tell Our Lord that we wish to be meek and humble of heart like him. We wish to be quick to forgive and to live in peace, and even, if it is necessary, to do good to those who offend us, or at any rate to pray fervently for them.

2. Quite apart from the most fearful physical torments, such as the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion, Jesus willed to endure extreme moral sufferings, such as the betrayal by Judas, the desertion by His Apostles in His hour of trial, and the denial by the Head of the Apostles himself. He willed to endure an even greater spiritual affliction than these, which was so mysterious as to be almost beyond our understanding. This was His abandonment by His heavenly Father. "My God, my God," He cried out in His last agony, "why hast thou forsaken Me?" His human heart elected to experience at

that moment the removal of the inmost consolations and joys which flowed from His continual union with His heavenly Father. He was both man and God. His human nature was hypostatically united to the Word, and in this way even His human nature participated in His infinite happiness. As man, however, He chose to be deprived of this happiness. Being burdened with all our sins, He wished to endure not only the most frightful sufferings, but even abandonment by His heavenly Father. We shall be able to understand this if we have ever experienced moral affliction, which can be so much worse than physical pain. On these occasions we should console ourselves with the reflection that Jesus has walked this way of sorrows before us. Then we shall remain united in these trials to Him who is the only source of comfort and resignation.

3. Jesus had now come to the last moments of His earthly life. The blood had been drained from His body as a result of His fatal wounds and He felt a great thirst. "I thirst," He murmured in a weak voice. He expressed in these words not only His physical thirst, but also His spiritual thirst for souls. He had given everything for the eternal salvation of men, yet he realised with divine foresight that many would refuse to co-operate with His infinite love. His thirst was a burning love for us, and it was answered on the physical level by the vinegar which was given to Him to drink and in the moral order by our ingratitude. Seeing that His mission was fulfilled, with His last breath Jesus entrusted His soul to His heavenly Father. *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*³ Then, in order to show that His death was voluntary, He cried out in a loud voice: *It is consummated!*⁴ Jesus was dead. Let us prostrate ourselves before His lifeless body, covered with sores and furrowed with blood. The infinite justice of God, which demanded an adequate reparation for our offences, has been satisfied by the goodness and infinite mercy of the God-Man. But the immense love of

Jesus, as well as His sufferings and death, should prevent us from ever offending Him again and should make us love Him more sincerely.

¹ Luke 23, 34.

² Is. 53, 5-7.

³ Luke 23, 46.

⁴ John 19, 30.

15th April

THE RESURRECTION¹

I. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fundamental truth of our faith. Jesus intended it to take place in such a way that nobody could reasonably deny it. There is no historical fact which can be upheld by such clear and ample evidence as the Resurrection of Our Lord. It emerges most of all from the absolute certainty of Jesus' death. After the fearful scourging, crowning with thorns, and crucifixion, His blood had poured forth for three hours from His nailed Hands and feet. Moreover, even though he saw that Christ was dead, the Roman soldier pierced His heart with a lance. His body was taken down from the cross and enclosed in the tomb until the third day. Jesus, therefore, was dead and buried. But there is still further proof. The Jews remembered that Jesus had prophesied that He would rise on the third day. For this reason they had the sepulchre sealed and they placed a guard of soldiers beside it so that the body could not be stolen. In spite of the enormous stone at the mouth of the tomb, however, Our Lord rose in glory, flinging the sentries into a state of terror and confusion. The frightened guards ran to the leaders of the Sanhedrin and related what had happened. If the Jewish authorities had believed that the soldiers were responsible, they would have punished them, and if they had believed that the body of Our Lord had been stolen, they would have searched for it. Instead, they bribed the soldiers to

say that the body of Jesus had been stolen while they were asleep.² St. Augustine comments on the stupidity of the Jews in calling on the testimony of sleeping witnesses! Jesus, moreover, saw to it that St. Thomas would not be present when He appeared to the other Apostles, and that he would believe only when he had seen the wounds in His hands and feet and had placed his finger in the gash made by the lance in Our Lord's side. What further evidence could anyone expect? There is a still stronger proof, however. After the death of Jesus the Apostles were an insignificant group of discouraged and disillusioned men, without the daring or the ability to accomplish anything. It was only the Resurrection of Jesus which could have given them the supreme courage to stand up to the Jews and to convert the world. Let us fall in adoration before the risen Christ and say with St. Thomas the Apostle: *My Lord and my God!*³

2. Even as Jesus rose from the dead, so we shall rise again. This is a dogma of our faith. "I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body." When Job was seated on his dunghill, his body rotting with leprosy, deserted by everybody, scorned by his wife and reproved by his friends, he found comfort in this great truth. *I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust where I myself shall see, and not another—and from my flesh I shall see God: my inmost being is consumed with longing.*⁴ St. Paul described this resurrection. In the twinkling of an eye, he says, at the sound of the trumpet of the Eternal Judge, our bodies will be reformed and will have life again. We shall all rise, but not all in the same manner. The body which was the companion of the soul during our mortal life will once again be its companion and share with it either the eternal glory of Heaven or the everlasting pains of Hell.⁵ We shall live forever like Jesus. "I believe in life everlasting," in everlasting happiness in Heaven or in eternal damnation in Hell. This great truth is a warning to us. If we remember it all our lives, we shall not steer our course towards evil and towards Hell, but towards goodness and towards

Heaven, where one day we shall come to rest in a land of lasting happiness:

3. Our resurrection must begin in this life, however. Day by day we must work hard for our spiritual resurrection. We should give this matter our special attention during Paschal time. Our resurrection must be real and not apparent like that of many people who celebrate Easter without any sincere intention of changing their lives. It should not be imperfect like that of Lazarus,⁶ who rose for a while and died again, but perfect like that of Jesus, over whom death no longer has dominion.⁷ In other words, we must rise never again to die in sin, which is the real death of the soul. We must rise also to ascend higher and higher on the way of perfection and to carry out Our Lord's command: *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*⁸ Our life should be a continual resurrection, a continual ascent towards perfection which will raise us from sin to the state of grace, from the state of grace to fervour, and from fervour to sanctity.

¹ This meditation and the two which follow it are suitable for Easter Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

² Mt. 28, 12.

³ John 20, 28.

⁴ Job 19, 25-27.

⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 15.

⁶ Cf. John 11, 43.

⁷ Cf. Rom. 6, 9.

⁸ Mt. 5, 48.

16th April

THE MEANING OF EASTER

1. Today the Church adorns herself in festival array. Gone are the lengthy lamentations of Holy Saturday and the sorrowful recitations of the Passion, and in their place is the glad cry of Alleluia, the hymn of victory over death and sin. The true joy of Easter lies not merely in external celebration, however, but in the spiritual gladness of the soul. As Jesus has conquered death and sin, so we must purify ourselves of every trace of guilt by a

good Confession and must be sure that it will result in a practical renovation of our lives. We should approach Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist with greater fervour and humility, and with greater trust in His goodness and mercy. When we have received Him into our hearts, we should ask Him to renew and transform us in Himself. He is everything, and we are nothing without Him. He is strong; we are weak. We are capable only of feeble desires to do good, but He can make them effective by His grace. We should not be satisfied with forming general resolutions when we go to Confession and receive Holy Communion at Easter. We should examine the depths of our soul and discover the sin which we are most accustomed to commit and the virtue which we are principally lacking. As a result of our investigation we should form a particular resolution to combat this sin and to practise this virtue. It is only in this way that our celebration of Easter can inaugurate the beginning of a genuine self-renewal which will gain momentum daily until it becomes a true spiritual resurrection. It will be a hard battle which will necessitate a constant vigilance and a readiness to begin again every time we realise that we have fallen. It will require an unflinching spirit of prayer, but the final victory will bring us such happiness that worldly pleasures will seem empty and illusory by comparison.

2. In the course of this battle for our spiritual resurrection it is necessary for us to grow continually in Jesus. When we make a good confession at Easter He favours us anew by means of His grace. When we receive Holy Communion He comes to us and is really present in our souls. But in what way is He present? Sometimes He is silent and hidden. He may seem to be asleep, as He slept in the Apostles' boat on the sea of Galilee when the waves were raging violently all around them. Often we have Jesus within us, but do not listen to His voice. He does not live actively in us; He does not speak to us. Why is this? It is because we are distracted and indifferent, absorbed in the petty affairs of this world. We must be fervent. It is necessary

to listen for His voice, to be united to Him, and above all to love Him. Then our actions will not be our own, but His. He will grow in us by His grace and we shall act in Jesus, with Jesus, and for Jesus. Then Jesus will be everything to us and we shall be able to say with St. Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*¹ Does this goal seem too difficult to attain? Does it seem that it is not meant for us? Such a doubt is an insult to Our Lord, Who has told us to be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect.² It is enough, however, that we should earnestly desire to reach this goal and should try with the help of God's grace to come gradually nearer to it every day.

3. This is the resurrection which should take place in us this Easter. Think seriously. How many Easters have we spent? Have they represented a constant improvement in our lives, or have we been static or even getting worse? In the Hebrew tongue Pasch means a passing or transit; specifically, it refers to the passing of the Lord. It will be a tragedy if Jesus passes us by without stopping to rest with us in order to claim us as His own and to make us holy. This Easter could be our last. The thought should be a warning for us. God's goodness is infinite, but there is a limit to His graces and favours. We often impose this limit ourselves by the degree of our co-operation. Our eternal salvation depends largely upon ourselves.

¹ Gal. 2, 20.

² Cf. Mt. 5, 48.

17th April

EASTER: THE HERALD OF PEACE

1. When Jesus was born in the manger at Bethlehem, the sky became brilliantly aglow and Angels descended singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will." When Our Lord had risen from the dead, He greeted

the Apostles with the words: "Peace be to you!" Peace is a gift from God; only He can give real peace. The peace of this world has a certain value, but it is nothing like the genuine and soul-satisfying peace which God can give us. This is why Jesus said to His Apostles: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.*¹ Worldly peace is external and can be disturbed or destroyed by men, but the peace of God is internal and nothing can destroy it except sin. It is possible to be persecuted and slandered and yet to preserve interior peace, as the Martyrs and the Saints did in adversity. It is this inner peace which we must aim at acquiring. We shall be truly content when we have achieved it, because, as St. Thomas says, "the fulness of joy is peace."² St. Thomas defined peace as "tranquillitas ordinis,"³ *i.e.* "tranquillity of order"; St. Augustine called it "ordinata concordia,"⁴ *i.e.* "ordered harmony." It is not sufficient for this harmony and order to be established externally among men. It is necessary that this harmony and order should reign first of all in our minds and hearts, and in our actions.

2. For this interior peace to be complete it is necessary that it should exist in our relations with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbour. Peace with God is especially necessary. This involves the subjection of the intellect and will to Him, perfect obedience to His law, the avoidance of sin and the entire surrender of ourselves to Him. When we have prepared ourselves in this way, God will visit us with His grace and we shall experience the joy of inward peace. Jesus came into the world to bring us this peace, which He purchased for us with His Precious Blood, thereby erasing sin and opening the gates of Heaven. So much the worse for us if we destroy the work of God by turning back to sin. We shall no longer be at peace with God, Who hates sin so much that in order to redeem us from it He gave us His only begotten Son, nor with ourselves, because *there is no peace to the wicked.*⁵ Remorse and disgust are the necessary results of sin. Let us remember that those who are really content even in

this world are those who lead good lives. Whoever extinguishes divine grace in himself destroys the harmony and order which reigned in his soul as a result of the subjection of his passions to right reason and of the subjection of his reason to his Creator and Redeemer. Then, because we are not at peace with God nor with ourselves, we cannot really be at peace with men. It is our faith which teaches us that they are our brothers, redeemed as we have been by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and that therefore we should always love and assist them.

3. At the close of this meditation let us ask the risen Christ to give us His peace, which is the only true peace. *My peace I give to you.*⁶ Although it comes from Jesus, however, this peace requires an effort on our part also. We must build it up carefully within ourselves with the help of God's grace. The foundations of interior peace must be laid down by controlling our passions, by avoiding the slightest trace of sin, by living the life of prayer and of union with God, by loving God above all things, and by living and working for Him alone.

¹ John 14, 27.² St. Th. 1-11, q. 70, a. 3.³ S. Th. 11-11, q. 29 a. 1 ad 1.⁴ De. civ. Dei, XIX, 13.⁵ Is. 48, 22.⁶ John 14, 27.

18th April

PUTTING CHRISTIANITY INTO PRACTICE

1. Imagine what the world would be like if the Gospel of Christ were practised in its entirety everywhere and by everybody. It would not, of course, become another earthly Paradise, because suffering and death are the legacy of sin and Our Lord did not remove these when He redeemed us but made them a necessary element in our purification and spiritual elevation. Nevertheless, the full practice of Christianity would transform

the world. A little reflection will convince us of this. Men would love God above all things and their neighbour as themselves. The sincere and ardent love of God would cause wickedness, brutality and every kind of immorality to disappear. Love of their neighbour would make men brothers in reality, so that there would be no more wars nor threats of conflict. The enormous wealth which is squandered on weapons of destruction could then be diverted to good works. There would be no more poverty, because if men loved one another those who had more than enough would give to those in want. There would be no more prisons, because there would be no more criminals. There would be no need for a police force because everyone would do his duty of his own accord. The reign of love, which is the reign of Jesus Christ, would triumph upon earth. Excessive wealth and the selfish love of ease and pleasure would disappear on one hand, while on the other the extreme need of those who can never be sure of a meal, nor of a roof over their heads, would be palliated until they had been raised to a standard of living consistent with the laws of God and with the dignity of men. The love of our neighbour as ourselves would solve every individual and social problem in this life. Men would grow into a vast community of brothers devoid of all barriers of hate, selfishness, and greed. This is not an Utopian dream, because it is the clear teaching of the Gospel. Jesus did not preach the impossible. He taught us the standards of the perfect life which we are all obliged to try and lead.

2. It was something like this which took place in the early years of the Church, when the love of God and of their neighbour was a transforming leaven in the lives of the faithful. *Give that which remains as alms*, Christ has said, *and behold, all things are clean to you.*¹ This precept was not, at this time, a dead letter, nor was it interpreted in a selfish and quibbling manner. It was a lofty reality. *Now the multitude of the believers were of one heart and one soul*, the Acts of the Apostles relates, *and not one of them*

*said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common . . . Nor was there anyone among them in want. For those who owned lands or houses would sell them and bring the price of what they sold and lay it at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each, according as any one had need.*² This is what it really means to love one's neighbour. It could not be called Communism, for that is a system of oppression which violates the laws of nature and the most sacred rights of humanity, such as the liberty, dignity and faith of the individual. No, this is Christian charity, the charity which complements and ennobles justice. Nobody was under any obligation to sell all he had and give it to the poor,³ for to do so was not a command but an evangelical counsel of perfection.⁴ Everybody believed, however, that he had an obligation to love his neighbour as if he were himself.

Do you love your neighbour as yourself? Take a look around you. How many people have no food, whereas you may have too much? How many have no home, while you have far more possessions than you need? How many live in squalor, while you may be surrounded by luxuries? Remember that you are not a sincere Christian, but only a fraud, if you do not love your neighbour as yourself. It may be true that this is only a matter of charity, not of strict justice. But, as St. Alphonsus said, it is much the same thing if a man is damned for lack of charity as for lack of justice. Meditate on this with a view to forming generous resolutions.

3. Only the universal practice of Christianity could change the world. Even after a period of twenty centuries it is true to say that for many Christians the Gospel is an unexplored book, the principles of which have yet to be fully realised in their ordinary lives. None of us can change the world on his own, but each of us can accomplish that part of the task which depends on himself. Do we really love God whole-heartedly and above all things? Do we really love our neighbour as ourselves? Let us

examine ourselves earnestly and find out how far we have still to go. Our love of God may be too feeble and this may be the reason why we have not achieved spiritual perfection. Our love of our neighbour may not be as generous as it should be. If this is so, we shall have to answer for it to God when He pronounces that terrible sentence on those who have been rejected: *Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not take me in, naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.*⁵ Let us resolve to be charitable and generous to the poor.

¹ Luke 11, 41.² Acts 4, 32-35.³ Cf. Acts 5, 4.⁴ Cf. Mt. 19, 21.⁵ Mt. 26, 41-43.

19th April

PRIDE

1. Pride is the sin of Satan. Being a pure spirit, he could not commit sins which have material things as their object, such as sins of impurity or of avarice. The one sin of which a spirit is capable is pride. Satan had been created by God and had been endowed with the loftiest gifts, but he was obliged to undergo a trial in order that he could merit the reward reserved for him by God, namely, the everlasting happiness of the Beatific Vision. It is generally held that God revealed to Satan and to all the legions of Angels the Eternal Word made man, Jesus Christ, and commanded them to adore Him. But when Satan and the other rebellious Angels saw in Jesus Christ a nature far inferior to their own, they were indignant because the Divine Word had not been united to the angelic instead of the human nature.

They refused to bow their haughty heads and flung back at God the arrogant and blasphemous ultimatum: "I will not serve."

This is the essence of pride; the creature attributes to himself the gifts which he has received from his Creator and believes that he can do without God. Pride is opposed to truth which requires us to acknowledge that we have received everything from God. We should not grow proud, therefore, but should gratefully refer all that we are and all that we have to our Lord and Creator. We should remember that one day we shall have to render to God a strict account of all these gifts.

2. Just as humility is the hardest of the virtues to acquire, pride is the most common of the vices. We are all conceited and take pride in things which do not belong to us, but to God. One would imagine that it would be easy to understand that we are nothing without God, but in practice it is the other way round. It is not only prominent personalities, noted scientists and men of letters, but also the most ordinary men who believe that they are unique and superior to their fellows. Other vices follow pride. There is presumption, which leads us to believe that we are more important than we really are and to attempt things which are beyond the powers which God has given us. There is ambition, which drives us to make an immoderate quest for honours and responsibilities our main goal in life, as if our heart could be satisfied by these things rather than by God and by our own sanctification. There is empty vanity, the futile but burning desire to be praised and esteemed, as if our merits (if we have any) were anything else but a gift from God, which we have been able to develop only by His assistance and grace. Let us examine ourselves in this regard and we shall find many distortions in our own personality. We shall discover many vain notions which we ought to dispel, and many selfish detractions from God's glory of which we are and have been guilty. "Take away pride," said St. Augustine, "and what are men but men?" Remove the mask of arrogance and affectation, and you will

find that even those men who regard themselves as outstanding personalities are very insignificant creatures after all. We can learn a great deal from a meditation on this subject.

3. Do you remember the occasion when the Apostles, their minds filled with ambitious speculation, approached Jesus, and asked Him who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Our Lord called a little child and placed him in the centre of the group. *Unless you turn and become like little children,* He said, *you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.*¹ How different are God's designs from the desires of men! His ways are full of simplicity and humility, in sharp contrast with our pride and ostentation. Jesus taught us this lesson not only in His discourses but also in His life. He was God and He became man; He was rich and He became poor. He left his heavenly mansion and came down to live in a stable in Bethlehem and in the home of a poor carpenter in Nazareth. For thirty years He performed a tradesman's job in this obscure village in Galilee. It was only when He had already spent thirty years teaching us His love of poverty that He emerged to preach the Gospel in public. After He had preached and worked miracles for three years, He sank back into the depths of lowliness and was even condemned to die upon the cross. This is a tremendous lesson for us. This is the road which we must travel if we are to follow Jesus.

¹ Mt. 18, 3.

20th April

THE MERCY OF GOD

1. God is the Being Who is infinitely true, beautiful, and good. His goodness is manifested in His infinite love for all the creatures which He has made, but it is in His relations with

sinner in particular that we call Him merciful. He loves all things which He has created and directs them towards Himself, their beginning and their end. When He is dealing, however, with beings endowed with free will, who can separate themselves from Him and even offend Him, He tries while respecting the liberty which He has given them to recall them to Himself by the influence of His love and of His grace. It is this supernatural out-pouring of love towards sinners which we call mercy.

The mercy of God shines forth in all the pages of Sacred Scripture. In the Old Testament there is promised and foreshadowed in many ways the coming of the Saviour of the sinful human race. In the New Testament Jesus appears, made man for our salvation, meek and humble of heart, and merciful towards the unfortunate, especially towards sinners. For them He offers His life and His Precious Blood, dying on the Cross with His arms outstretched, as if in an embrace of forgiveness. He tells us that He has not come to call the just, but sinners,¹ and that He has not come to those who are in health, but to those who are sick²; He assures us that if we ask the Father for anything in His name, it will be given to us.³ So much goodness should move and soften our hearts. Even if we are unfaithful servants and are covered with the leprosy of sin, let us go to Him and He will heal us. Even if we have deserved Hell a thousand times, let us shed tears of repentance at His feet as Magdalen did, and He will give us His forgiveness and His peace.

2. Let us meditate in particular on certain passages in the Gospel in which God's mercy for sinners stands out most vividly and appealingly. There is the incident of the adulteress who is brought before Our Lord by the hypocritical Pharisees. According to the law she should have been stoned to death. Jesus looks at her accusers, who harbour in the secrecy of their own hearts God knows how many abominations but strut about in public with the mien of stern and impeccable judges. Then He rivets His gaze upon the shamefaced woman who is looking like a

soiled rag thrown away on a dust-heap. When Jesus addresses her relentless judges His voice is steady: *Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her.* When they all drift away with lowered heads, Jesus says pityingly to the woman: *Has no one condemned thee? . . . Neither will I condemn thee. Go thy way, and from now on sin no more.*⁴

Elsewhere Jesus is called "the good shepherd" who knows His sheep and calls them to Himself one by one. If a poor sheep is lost, He leaves the other ninety-nine of His flock and searches for it, nor does He rest until it has been found. When He sees that it has been injured, He carries it back to the fold upon His shoulders. Who could forget the touching parable of the prodigal son? He had left the house of his aging father and had gone to a distant country where he had squandered his inheritance in the course of a low and worldly life of pleasure. When all his money had been spent he was very much alone, and was reduced to such circumstances that he took a job looking after unclean animals. One day when he was weeping over his fate, he made a sudden resolution. *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.* His father had been waiting for him for many years. He met and embraced him and gave him the kiss of pardon. Then he held a great feast because his son had repented and come home. He "*was dead and has come to life, he was lost and is found*".⁵ No matter how great our faults may be, let us trust in the infinite mercy of God, and when we go to Him He will grant us forgiveness and peace.

3. Remember, however, that if God's mercy is infinite so is His justice. When we realise that we have fallen into serious sin, we should not give way to despair as Judas did, but should turn to Jesus trustingly and contritely, saying with the Psalmist: *My refuge and my fortress, my stronghold, my deliverer, my shield, in whom I trust.*⁶ We shall certainly be forgiven. It would be the highest form of ingratitude to abuse God's goodness and mercy.

Let our repentance be sincere and effective. In return for the infinite goodness of God let us give Him our love, limited indeed but willing and constant.

¹ Luke 5, 32.² Mark 2, 17.³ John 16, 23.⁴ Cf. John 8, 3-11.⁵ Cf. Luke 15, 11-32.⁶ Ps. 143, 2.

21st April

OUR DESIRES

1. Most people are always longing for something. Those who are poor yearn to be rich. Those who are in bad health and are not resigned are longing to be cured. Those who have plenty of money and good health, but misuse these gifts to satisfy their lower urges in the hope of finding happiness, find instead only emptiness and remorse. Those who covet honours and fame are restless when they see their colleagues succeeding while they themselves remain on the bottom rung of the ladder. On the other hand, those who reach the summit of their profession and believe that they have fulfilled their purpose in life, soon discover that the easy chair in which they hoped to settle down is padded with thorns. The glory which they have won is an empty thing, the object of the envy or of the contempt of others. So we are all yearning and sighing and cannot find peace. Our hearts cannot be at rest in this world. *Here we have no permanent city*, says St. Paul, *but we seek for the city that is to come.*¹ St. Augustine has summed up the reason for our continual longing. "You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our hearts will never rest until they find rest in You."²

2. Our desires may be vain or culpable or meritorious. It is useless to long for the impossible or to base our desires on motives contrary to Christian resignation. Happiness cannot be

found on earth, so it is futile to look for it here. It is much better to suppress these vain desires and to convert them into a longing for God and for our own perfection. Some desires are blameworthy, for they spring from an immoderate attachment to worldly things, such as wealth or honours or even sin. These desires are always sinful and can be seriously so when they are deliberately directed towards evil objects. Finally, however, there are desires which are good and reasonable. Even Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prayed earnestly to His heavenly Father to take away from Him, if possible, the bitter chalice of the Passion. But He added immediately: *Yet not my will but thine be done.*³ When He was hanging from the cross on Calvary, feeling crushed beneath the weight of our sins and utterly abandoned, He cried out in an agony of yearning: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*⁴ Nevertheless, He accepted with perfect self-surrender and obedience all His sufferings, even His mysterious abandonment by His heavenly Father. The Saints followed the example of Jesus. Their lives were as full of longing as they were of suffering. But just as they offered their sufferings to God with generous hearts, so they offered Him their desires as a prayer of supplication. The prophet David yearned for mercy and forgiveness and his longing was expressed for all time in the psalm *Miserere*. St. Teresa longed to suffer and to die for the love of Jesus. When St. Paul was labouring and praying for the salvation of his fellow-men, he desired *to depart and to be with Christ, a lot by far the better.*⁵

3. What desires have we? Are they all directed towards holiness and towards Jesus? Or are they all for useless worldly things? In times of physical or spiritual affliction do we make sure that our desires are in conformity with and subject to the will of God? Let us examine ourselves seriously. If we find that any of our desires are vain or sinful, let us change this state of affairs at once. Let us make God the object of all the longing in our hearts. Let us ask Him always for those virtues which are really

necessary for us, especially for an increase in our love for Him and in our readiness to do His will.

¹ Heb. 13, 14.

² Confessions I, 1, 1.

³ Luke 22, 42.

⁴ Mt. 27, 46.

⁵ Cf. Phil. 1, 23.

22nd April

FASTING AND ABSTAINING

I. Nowadays fast and abstinence take the form of precepts of the Church which bind us under pain of mortal sin. Before they were commanded by the Church, however, they had been commanded by God. God made the first law of this kind when He ordered Adam to abstain from the forbidden fruit. Moses made particular laws of fast and abstinence for the Jewish people. He also fasted himself, as did the prophet Elias. *My knees totter from my fasting*, writes King David, *and my flesh is wasted of its substance*.¹ *Prayer is good with fasting and alms*,² says Tobias. Jesus fasted for forty days as an example to us and He warned us that the devil can be conquered only by prayer and fasting.³ In a more general way, He warned us that: *Unless you repent, you will all perish*.⁴ One of the means of doing penance most often recommended in Sacred Scripture is fasting and abstaining.

Why, you may ask, should Our Lord and the Church command us to mortify ourselves in regard to food? There is a strong reason. It is an act of obedience to God, our absolute master, Who does not demand anything of us save for our own welfare. Secondly, it is an act of reparation for our sins. In the third place, it enables us to subdue our carnal impulses and in this way makes us more obedient to the law of God. A man who cannot mortify his appetite for food will certainly not be able to resist the temptations of the flesh. There is a connection between all these things. If we cannot subordinate our bodily

appetites to our spiritual faculties and to the divine law, we shall not be able to raise ourselves from the level of an animal existence to contact with God through prayer and the practice of virtue.

2. It is irrelevant to object that there is no harm in eating one kind of food rather than another. In fact, this is not a question of food at all. It is a question of obedience to the laws of God and of the Church. God is the supreme Lord of heaven and earth and it is wrong to disobey His commands. Similarly, it is not permissible to disobey the precepts of the Church which Jesus Christ founded to be our infallible guide. God commanded the Hebrews to abstain from blood-meat and from so-called unclean animals. Today the Church has set aside a minimum number of days of fast and abstinence. How can we ignore the commands of God and of the Church? To do so would be an act of rebellion against the highest of all authorities as well as a sign of indifference to our eternal salvation. Even the purest of the Saints, such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, constantly mortified themselves in this way. "If you have sinned, do penance," writes St. Augustine. If we reflect on the number of our sins, the insignificant degree of fast and abstinence demanded by the Church today will not seem excessive. Indeed, we should be glad to fast and abstain a little more than is necessary in order to expiate our sins and to gain control over our carnal instincts. Let us show God how much we love Him by being prepared to undertake voluntary mortifications.

3. Other objections are sometimes raised against fasting and abstaining. These include poor health, excessive work, a frail constitution, and so on. Such reasons for exempting ourselves should be carefully considered before God and in consultation with our confessor. If they are genuine, we are entitled to omit fast and abstinence either partly or entirely. God is more interested in our good intentions than in any material act, which is demanded only as a proof of our good will.

If we cannot actually fast and abstain we can mortify ourselves

spiritually. We can curb our tongues by avoiding idle and uncharitable conversations. We can mortify our eyes by avoiding looking at anything which might lead us into danger. We can mortify our hearing by seeking a certain degree of solitude and silence. We can mortify our bodies by depriving ourselves of unnecessary luxuries. Above all, we must abstain from sin and from the occasions of sin. This is the basic fast which we are all obliged to keep at all costs by means of constant and fervent prayer.

¹ Ps. 108, 24.² Tob. 12, 8.³ Mt. 17, 20.⁴ Luke 13, 5.

23rd April

FAITH AND CHARITY

I. Faith is a gift from God.¹ We should, therefore, ask for it in our prayers. Faith cannot enter into a proud soul because *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*² If a man does not pray, his faith grows weaker and he may lose it altogether. Faith must be nourished continually by grace which is obtained through prayer. A man who is in a state of mortal sin loses his faith, especially if he is a slave to impurity, because only the clean of heart can see God.³ St. Thomas knew what he was talking about when he said that "faith is the foundation of the entire spiritual edifice of the Christian life."⁴ It is faith nourished by grace which raises us to the supernatural level, where everything which we do, say or think becomes meritorious in the sight of God. *My just one lives by faith.*⁵ The keener and stronger our faith is, the firmer is the foundation of our spiritual life and the more numerous are our good works. This is not to say that faith excludes all study and investigation. In fact, the more lively is our faith, the more earnest will be our desire to understand better the terms in which our faith is expressed and to explore

the intimate connection between divine revelation and human knowledge. Study of this kind will prove a refreshing experience because it will bring us to the threshold of the contemplation of eternal truth. Reason is not humiliated but ennobled by the light of revelation, which raises it to a higher plane.

2. Faith is a wonderful thing. As has been said, it is a supernatural gift from God which we should keep alive by prayer. Faith alone is not enough, however. It is the foundation on which we must build the structure of our Christian life. It is especially necessary for it to be united to the flame of charity. "Without love," says St. Augustine, "there is only the faith which the devil has,"⁶ because, as St. James explains, *the devils also believe and tremble.*⁷ We, however, should believe and love. We must combine faith with charity towards God and towards our neighbour. Our faith should be active. As St. Paul says, it should work under the influence of charity.⁸ Without charity and good works, faith is a lifeless thing. If we really believe, we should love God above all things, even more than we love ourselves; and we should be ready to make any sacrifice for Him, even the sacrifice of our lives. Faith should induce us to think constantly of God and charity should urge us to do everything for His sake rather than for any lesser purpose. If we lack this kind of charity, we cannot claim to be sincere Christians.

3. Our faith should be suffused by love of our neighbour as well as by the love of God. We should love our neighbour as ourselves. Does anybody really practise this fundamental Christian precept? Once again, let us contrast the magnificent mansions and places of entertainment of the rich with the slums and hovels where thousands are living in conditions which are not fit for rational human beings. Is this Christianity? Is this the teaching of the Gospel? What would Jesus say about such aspects of modern life? It would seem that the Gospel is still a closed book for many Christians. Let us examine ourselves on this commandment, which is so generally ignored that the conse-

quences are likely to be disastrous for everybody. Let us investigate how much responsibility we bear for this sad and dangerous state of affairs. Let us make appropriate resolutions which will save us from the peril of God's final and fearful condemnation: *Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire . . . As long as you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me.*⁹

¹ S. Th. 11-11, q. 45.² James 4, 6; 1 Peter 5, 5.³ Cf. Mt. 5, 8.⁴ S. Th. 111, q. 73, a. 3.⁵ Heb. 10, 38.⁶ St. Augustine, De Carit., 10.⁷ James 2, 19.⁸ Gal. 5, 6.⁹ Cf. Mt. 25, 41-46.

24th April

THE THREE GRADES OF PERFECTION

1. God's great commandment could create in us a sense of confusion and fear. *You are to be perfect*, He orders us, *even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹ Is it possible for weak creatures like us to achieve the perfection of God Himself? At first sight this commandment seems quite impossible, but it is possible for us to act upon it with the grace of God. We must understand it properly, in any case. We shall never reach divine perfection, but we are obliged by Our Lord's command to strive towards it constantly by every means in our power. Perfection should be our most ardent desire, and not merely a theoretical ideal, but a practical aim. This practical intention can inspire our entire life in such a way that it will become a continual ascent towards sanctity and towards God. We need never lose heart even when we suffer a set-back in our spiritual progress. God allows us to fall so that we may be humbled and may place our trust in His grace instead of in ourselves.

2. According to St. Ignatius there are three grades of perfection. The first consists in being ready to avoid mortal sin at

all costs, even to the ultimate sacrifice. Circumstances may require us to be martyrs for the faith by being prepared to shed our blood rather than deny Jesus. Circumstances may also require us to be martyrs for our Christian way of life by being prepared to lose everything, health, fortune, and friendship, rather than commit a mortal sin. We are all obliged to reach this first grade of perfection. If anyone refuses to recognise this, he is already in a state of mortal sin in so far as he is prepared to sin grievously rather than make any real sacrifice. Such a man loves himself and his own comfort more than he loves God.

The second grade of perfection consists in a state of indifference to created things, to everything except God, whether it is to health or sickness, wealth or poverty, praise or blame, success or failure. All these things can be used equally well in the loving service of God and in the salvation of our souls. The first grade of perfection is based on the love of God. The second is founded on the love of God alone, so that we are indifferent to everything else as long as we love, serve and give glory to God. We seek other things only in so far as they can help us to know and love God better. We avoid them in so far as they can keep us apart from Him.

3. The third grade of perfection consists in preferring suffering to pleasure, humiliations to honours, and the cross to an easy life. By these means we imitate Christ better and show our love for Him. The way of the cross is the way of Jesus and is the only path to holiness. It is easier for those who walk this path to be detached from sin and from the world and to remain close to Jesus. This is the way which the Saints chose.

In which grade of perfection are we? Even if we are still far from the peak of the third grade of perfection, we should nevertheless work hard to reach it. It is particularly essential that we should stand firm in the first grade by being faithful to the motto of St. Dominic Savio: "Death rather than sin!"

¹ Mt. 5, 48.

25th April

WORD AND EXAMPLE

1. There is great power in the spoken word. It can act like a ray of light upon the mind of a man groping about in the darkness of error. It can present a moving appeal to a sinner to return to God. It can comfort the soul in affliction and in loneliness. Good example, however, is even more powerful than speech. At times it can be irresistible. A man can remain deaf to good advice, but it is difficult for him to remain unaffected by the virtuous behaviour and spirit of sacrifice of someone who is trying to lead him towards goodness. The sermons of the Saints were effective not only because they were inspired by love for God and for souls, but also because they were reinforced by the holiness of the preachers. St. Augustine was converted by the pleadings and prayers of St. Monica, but apart from the grace of God it was the example of his mother's sanctity which made her exhortations so convincing. It was as much by the example of his untiring zeal as by the simplicity of his sermons that the Cure d'Ars converted thousands upon thousands of people. St. Francis de Sales would never have converted so many heretics if his apostolic personality had not possessed such a quality of supernatural attractiveness. Let us do as much good as we can by means of speech whenever the opportunity arises, but above all let us make sure that our lives reflect faithfully the principles which we proclaim. This is the only way in which we shall be able to lead our fellow-men to God.

2. Good example is the most effective sermon, and we are all obliged to preach in this fashion. God entrusted the care of his neighbour to each one of us.¹ Each of us is responsible for the salvation of those who have been entrusted to him in this way, especially for the salvation of those who live near him and are influenced by his behaviour. Jesus' exhortations in this regard

have the force of a command. *Let your light shine before men*, He says, *in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*² St. Paul urges us to *provide good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.*³ This must not be interpreted as meaning that we should be anxious for others to see our good deeds in order that they may respect and praise us. It is our own undoing if our good example is tainted with ostentation, for we should lose all merit for it and should deserve to hear the words of the Eternal Judge: *You have received your reward.*⁴ Our good example should be inspired only by the love of God and of our neighbour but never by self-love.

3. We should give good example everywhere and in every way, at home and in the church, in the company of those who are subordinate to us and of those who have authority over us, in speech and in dress, by moderation in our eating habits and in the furnishings of our house, by the pictures which we hang in our rooms and by the books and magazines which we read. We should be particularly careful to keep in safe custody those books and journals which are necessary to us for purposes of study but could be an occasion of sin for others. Our whole demeanour should radiate goodness. Let us remember the words of St. James: *He who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.*⁵ By saving the souls of others we save our own.

¹ Ecclus. 17, 12.

² Mt. 5, 16.

³ Cf. Rom. 12, 17.

⁴ Cf. Mt. 6, 5.

⁵ James 5, 20.

26th April

SCANDAL

1. The Gospel contains a frightening condemnation of those who give scandal. *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe*

*in me to sin, it were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandal! . . . If thy hand or thy foot is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off and cast it from thee! It is better for thee to enter life maimed or lame than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire . . .*¹ Why was Christ so strict on scandal-givers? He condemned them because they are the accomplices of the devil. Not satisfied with doing evil themselves, they seek by means of bad example to draw others towards ruin as well. They try to destroy Christ's work of Redemption and the fruits of the shedding of His Precious Blood. Let us examine our own conduct. If we discover anything which could provide an occasion of sin for others, let us remedy it immediately. Thoughtlessness in such matters can be very dangerous. Something which seems perfectly innocent to us could be a source of scandal to others. Prudence and delicacy are necessary in our relations with our fellow-men.

2. There are men today who draw large profits from what Pope Pius XII called the industrialisation of evil. Scandal is not only widespread, but it has actually become an industry. It has been found that it pays to arouse the passions of the young by means of the cinema, television, books, newspapers, and other media of entertainment. This vast industry of evil destroys the purity of young souls, poisons innocent hearts, overthrows the moral foundations of Christian families, and subverts the entire structure of civil society. Can you who are reading this disclaim all responsibility for such a state of affairs? Examine your conscience. Perhaps you do not write or publish scandalous magazines, but it is you who buy them and leave them around to be read by others. In this way you contribute to the spread of evil. You should be stricter with yourself and with others where there is a question of scandal. Do not plead that this doubtful periodical or newspaper or film makes no impression on your own mind. This is false in the first place, because evil can harm

everybody sooner or later. Drops of water can wear out a stone. Moreover, even if it were true, you have no right to endanger others by your encouragement of evil.

3. Some people are careful to avoid giving grave scandal, but do not give it a thought in matters which they regard as trivial. They have no scruples about imprudent gestures, malicious innuendoes, double-meaning conversations, acts of impatience, lack of understanding, or constant grumbling. Such things may seem trivial in themselves, but can cause a great deal of harm in certain circumstances and in certain types of company. We should keep control over ourselves and examine our behaviour in these matters every evening. If we examine ourselves properly, we shall realise that we have failed to a greater or less degree. Consequently, we shall recognize our obligation to make reparation as far as possible for any scandal which we have given. This can be done especially by giving good example. We have a strict obligation in conscience to make reparation for scandal.

¹ Cf. Mt. 18, 6-9.

27th April

THE ONLY REMEDY FOR ALL OUR ILLS

1. Life is a continual battle. *Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?*¹ If we consider only the material aspect of this battle, we are all among the vanquished. Admittedly, there is some joy and some victory. But our pleasures are as short-lived as the flowers of the field; they are soon *withered and dried up like grass.*² Our conquests are also very insignificant; they can inflate us for a while, but they do not last long and cannot satisfy us. After death only our triumphs in virtue will persist. Moreover, whereas the joys of this life are few and fleeting, the physical and moral sufferings are innumerable. Sometimes they are so heavy and

overwhelming that they cause us to despair. But surely there is a remedy for all the evils which afflict us? God is infinitely good, and He has permitted suffering. Will He not give us the means of enduring it and the medicine to cure it? In fact, Our Lord has given us a remedy for all our ills, even for the most distressing. It is a bitter medicine, but it will heal anyone who has the courage to swallow it, and it will give him perfect peace of soul. The treatment consists of three stages: (1) Doing the will of God in all things with complete resignation. (2) Doing everything for the love of God. (3) Doing everything and enduring everything for the love of God alone. When a man reaches this highest peak of the spiritual life, he acquires that perfect peace of soul which the Saints possessed.

2. The first stage consists in doing God's will generously on all occasions. Will God give us a little happiness and satisfaction in the present life? Let us accept whatever He allows us without becoming excessively attracted by it. Let us never lose our hearts in earthly pleasures, but let us preserve them intact for Jesus. Then the joys and honours of this world will not disturb our souls nor keep them apart from God. Will God send us suffering and privation? Let us accept these with resignation to His holy will. Our final end, which is eternal life, can be achieved equally well by means of joy or sorrow as long as we accept everything from God's hands and offer it to Him in accordance with His will. Let us remember that we have to do the will of God in any case, whether willingly or unwillingly. The only difference is that if we do it willingly we shall gain peace and merit in the sight of God. If we do it unwillingly, we can expect no reward and shall increase the weight of sin upon our shoulders.

3. We should not stop short at doing the will of God with resignation, but should aim at doing it from the motive of love. We should perform all our most ordinary actions and accept physical and moral suffering purely for the love of God. Then we shall have peace both in joy and in sorrow, and we shall be

happy. Only the Saints fully understood this great principle of doing and enduring everything for the love of God alone. They made it their basic rule of life. If Jesus granted them consolation and favours, they thanked Him. If He sent them severe sufferings and spiritual desolation, they were equally grateful. *To me to live is Christ*,³ said St. Paul. Jesus Christ must reign supreme in my will and in my heart and in all my actions. Then sorrow and suffering will be all the same to me and I shall possess the peace and happiness of the Saints.

¹ Job. 7, 1.

² Cf. Ps. 101, 5.

³ Phil. 1, 21.

28th April

THE WORD OF GOD

1. After Holy Communion, the word of God is the most nourishing food of the soul. St. Augustine urges us to listen to the word of God with the same devotion with which we approach the Blessed Eucharist. It is the normal method God uses to communicate with our souls in order to instruct and enlighten them and to lead them along the path of virtue. It is true that God sometimes makes direct contact with us by means of good inspirations or extraordinary graces, but the ordinary way in which He calls us to eternal life is by His divine word, whether it is proclaimed by His ministers, read in Sacred Scripture, illustrated in the lives of the Saints or outlined by masters of the spiritual life. Most important of all is the living word of the lawful representatives of God. Jesus did not specifically command His Apostles to write, but to preach. *He who believes and is baptised, He added, shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.*¹ Mary Magdalen was converted by the preaching of Jesus and wept for her sins. The sermons of St. John the Baptist called upon the Jewish people to do penance.

Centuries earlier the prophet Nathan had converted David by means of the inspired word of God and the prophet Jonah had roused the Ninivites to repentance. We should treasure the word of God. We should read and listen to it with humility and devout attention. Whenever we hear a sermon or read Sacred Scripture or some spiritual book, we should reflect that it is God Himself Who is preaching to us. We should not be guided merely by a spirit of curiosity, desire for knowledge, or love of eloquence or literary style, but by the determination to apply such instruction to ourselves and to put it into practice.

2. In the parable of the sower,² Jesus tells us that the seed is the Word of God. Some seed falls by the wayside, that is, upon hardened and dissipated hearts which admit every kind of thought and affection except the love of God. The good seed cannot take root and the birds of the air come and eat it. Other seed falls upon rocky ground, but as soon as it has sprung up it withers away for want of moisture. Other seed falls among thorns, which choke it and prevent it from growing. Finally, some of the seed falls upon good ground and yields fruit a hundredfold. Let us read this parable and examine the way in which we hear the word of God. Are our hearts hard like the surface of the wayside, so that we are deaf and indifferent to the word of God? Or do we receive it with joy and enthusiasm at first, but lack the constancy to put it into practice, so that the seed dies for want of moisture and we forget everything which we promised? Or are our minds and hearts caught up in a tangle of earthly preoccupations—business, pleasure, and other interests—which choke the good seed and prevent it from yielding fruit? Let us make a thorough examination of our attitude. If we fall into any of these categories, let us remind ourselves that one day we shall have to render an account to God of all the gifts which we have received and the way in which we have used them.

3. The word of God should be for us a summons to turn completely from vice towards virtue. It should be the lamp

which illuminates the darkness of our minds and helps us to see the ugliness of sin. It should revive our faith and set our hearts on fire with the love of God and the desire for Heaven. Every sermon which we hear and every prayer of Sacred Scripture which we read should incite us to further progress in the way of Christian perfection. This should be our main goal in life. If we try hard to reach it, we shall, by the grace of God, become the good ground in which the divine seed will bear abundant fruit for eternal life.

¹ Cf. Mark 16, 16.

² Cf. Luke 8, 5-15.

29th April

THE DIGNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

1. It is a great dignity to be a Christian. By Baptism we become sons of God, heirs to Heaven, temples of the Holy Spirit, and members of the Mystical Body of Jesus, which is the Church. God's grace raises us to the supernatural order and makes us, as St. Paul expresses it, sharers in the divine nature. By the sacrament of Confirmation the Holy Spirit fortifies our faith and gives us the strength to resist the temptations of the devil and to fight like loyal soldiers for the triumph in ourselves and in others of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The sacrament of Penance is our plank of salvation in the shipwreck of sin. Although we are all wretched sinners, by this gift of the divine mercy we can recover our lost innocence and return to the grace and friendship of God. Moreover, in order to prevent us from falling back into sin, Jesus gives us Himself in the Blessed Eucharist, which is called by St. Thomas the greatest miracle of His infinite love.¹ But this is not all. If it is our vocation to form a family, God consecrates our union at the altar and gives

us the graces necessary to sanctify it so that it may produce a good Christian family. If God has called us, on the other hand, to become spiritual fathers of the souls redeemed by His Precious Blood, He raises us to this high dignity by the sacrament of Holy Orders. Finally, when we shall have come to the end of our mortal lives, the priest will be still by our side to wash away by the sacrament of Extreme Unction the last traces of sin and to comfort us in our passage to eternity. The whole life of a Christian is a chain of favours which accompany him from the cradle to the grave. We should be grateful to God for the goodness with which He has treated us and continues to treat us. We should co-operate generously with His gifts by recognising the lofty honour it is to be a Christian and by living in accordance with this dignity.

2. This exalted dignity carries with it grave obligations. The most important is to avoid sin. Who would dare to take the Crucifix and fling it in the mud? *You are the body of Christ*, St. Paul tells us, *member for member*.² A man who surrenders himself to sin, therefore, throws the body of Christ into the mud and profanes the temple of the Holy Spirit. If we sincerely appreciate our dignity as Christians we cannot possibly give way to sin and destroy in ourselves the great work of the Redemption of Christ. We should, moreover, practise virtue. We should live in and for Jesus, like St. Paul, who said *For to me to live is Christ . . .*³ Every day we must travel further along the difficult road of self-denial and love. We must keep going forward, higher and higher towards the summit of perfection. *You are to be perfect*, Jesus tells us, *even as your heavenly Father is perfect*.⁴ Even this is not enough, however. A genuine Christian is not satisfied with avoiding sin and sanctifying himself, but he tries by every means at his disposal, by word, action, good example and sacrifice, to spread the kingdom of Christ among his fellow-men.

3. Let us examine ourselves particularly on the duties of our

state and see if we are fulfilling them generously. Not only are we obliged to obey the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, but each of us must carry out also the obligations attached to his position in life. We are well aware of what these obligations are. Naturally, they vary from person to person. Let us remember that God gives each of us the graces necessary for his state and that we shall have to account for the way we have used these before the Eternal Judge. The man who has received a lot will have to account for a lot. Perhaps we have received a very large share of graces. If so, besides the general duties attached to the dignity of being Christians, we have other important obligations which, as Christians, we must carry out generously.

¹ Opusc. 57.

² Cf. 1 Cor. 12, 27.

³ Phil. 1, 21.

⁴ Mt. 5, 48.

30th April

THE DIVIDED HEART

I. To whom does your heart belong? To the devil, perhaps? It may be that you have allowed him to insinuate himself into your soul, so that you have fallen under his tyranny and are trying to find happiness in the satisfaction of your lower impulses. Remember the warning of St. Paul: *If anyone destroys the temple of God, him will God destroy; for holy is the temple of God and this temple you are.*¹ If you have fallen this low, you will suffer the penalty decreed by the Holy Spirit: *There is no peace to the wicked.*² You expected to find satisfaction, and you have found disillusionment. You hoped for peace and found remorse. Instead of the happiness you expected you will know only despair unless you turn back to God immediately. There is only one way out of your predicament, the way chosen by the prodigal son: *I will get up and go to my father.*³ Rise up, then,

and cast yourself into the merciful arms of your heavenly Father Who is waiting for you. There you will find that peace of soul which will remain with you until you die. If you never allow your heart to be separated from God again, this peace will flower into eternal happiness in the next life.

2. Even if your heart has not become the property of the devil and retains a horror of mortal sin, it is still possible that you have not given it completely to God. Your heart is divided. Part of it belongs to God and part of it to the world. You are distracted by your own self-love and earthly desires. A heart which is divided in its affections between God and the world is dazzled by everything around it and tends to forget God more and more. We protest that we belong entirely to God, but in practice we are so absorbed by work, ambition, and pleasure, that we neglect God. A man who is torn between love of God and love of the world is like Cain who, unlike Abel, did not offer God the best part of his flock but kept this for himself and offered God whatever he had rejected. God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice but had no regard for that of Cain, who finally became a murderer and was cursed by his Creator. Do we offer God the leavings of life while we keep the best part of it for ourselves? Do we think of ourselves nearly all the time and give very little thought to God? This is not the way in which God has dealt with us. Not only has He created us, but He loves us with an everlasting love. He came down on earth and lived as our fellow-man. He redeemed us by His Precious Blood and gave Himself to us as our spiritual food. Why are we not willing to give ourselves to Him for ever in return? Gratitude demands that we should do so. God, moreover, is our supreme and only good.

3. Remember Our Lord's warning that it is impossible to serve two masters. We cannot serve God and at the same time be preoccupied with self-love, worldly pleasure, and sin. Look at the Saints. Their hearts were never divided but belonged

wholly to God. They did everything in their power to keep their hearts pure and burning with love for Him. They suffered because of their slightest imperfections and longed to remain always close to God. We should imitate them. We have to look after our daily duties, it is true, but everything should be done for the love and glory of God. All our actions should constitute a spiritual ladder which brings us closer and closer to God.

¹ 1 Cor. 3, 17.

² Is. 48, 22.

³ Luke 15, 18.

M A Y

1st May

THE MONTH OF MARY

I. It is often said that May is the most beautiful month of the year. The flowers are in full bloom, the weather is mild, and the first fruits of the soil are beginning to reward man's labour. It is fitting that we should dedicate to Mary the most beautiful month of the year, for she is the most beautiful of God's creatures.

We should offer this month to Mary by increasing our love for her. We should love her with a filial love, for she loves us with the heart of a mother. If we contemplate her beauty and goodness, we shall be inflamed with love for her. It will be a tender love such as we have for our earthly mother, and at the same time a respectful and worshipful love such as we ought to have for the Mother of God. Our offering of the month of May to Mary should result in a twofold resolution:—the resolution to make good our failings and to advance in holiness. This is the only way in which we can prove the sincerity of our affection, by deeds rather than by words. It is certain that we have many faults of character. Let us examine ourselves in front of Our Lady's altar by comparing our weakness with her magnificence of soul. When we have discovered our failings, let us be courageous in eradicating them. We can offer this sacrifice to Mary with love and generosity, no matter how hard it may be.

We can spend every day of this month digging out those weeds in the garden of our soul, which our passions and the influence of the devil have helped to flourish. Let us plant and bring to perfection in their place the flowers of Christian virtue. In this way we shall make the month of May very pleasing to Mary.

2. This work of eradicating our faults and replacing them by their opposite virtues is a difficult task which we cannot carry out on our own. Prayer is necessary if we are to obtain the grace which we need. During Mary's month we should beseech our heavenly Mother with greater earnestness to obtain for us from her divine Son the grace which we need to correct the evil in our nature and to perfect it in goodness. Mary wants us to pray to her because she wishes to obtain for us the graces which we require. She loves us very much and is ready to help us to become, like her, living imitations of Jesus in so far as the weakness of our nature will permit. Among our other prayers let us remember to give pride of place to the Rosary, whether we recite it in church or with the family. Let us include at least a quarter of an hour of meditation; a daily visit, however short, to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady's altar; an examination of conscience in the evening; and many ejaculatory prayers during the day which will express our love for Mary and for her divine Son.

3. Holy Mary, my most tender Mother, I love you and desire to love you more and more. I realise that I am spiritually poor and imperfect. You who are close to the all-powerful God, please help me by your favour and intercession. I know that Jesus will grant everything you ask of Him. Obtain for me, therefore, during this month, the grace to eradicate all my vices and to cause to flourish in my soul all the virtues of which I stand in need. Set my heart on fire with the love of God and help me to grow more and more like you and like your divine Son. Amen.

2nd May

THE INTERCESSION OF OUR LADY

1. Mary's intercession is very powerful with God. St. Bernard tells us that it is the will of God that everything comes to us

through her holy hands.¹ He assures us that Mary is the Mediatrix through whom we receive all favours from God.² Her power of intercession is the result of her divine and human motherhood. Because she is the Mother of God, Jesus refuses her nothing; because she is our mother, she loves us dearly and is eager to obtain from God the spiritual favours for which we ask. For this reason we should approach her with complete confidence. St. Bernard also writes: "If anyone feels that he is overwhelmed by the tempests of this world and cannot keep an even course, let him raise his eyes towards Mary . . . let him think of Mary . . . let him call upon Mary . . . In danger and in doubt let him remember Mary and call upon her. Let the thought of Mary never leave his mind; let her name be always on his lips . . ."³ In all our necessities we should have confident recourse to our heavenly Mother. Let us remember, however, that if we wish to be true sons of Mary and to be sure of being heard by her, we should ask especially for spiritual graces. Afterwards we can ask, with equal confidence but with resignation to God's will, for temporal favours, provided that they will not stand in the way of our eternal salvation.

2. There is a passage in the Gospel which illustrates in outstanding fashion Mary's great power of intercession. St. John relates⁴ that, along with Mary and the Apostles, Jesus took part in a wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee. During the banquet the wine ran short. Mary realised how embarrassing this would be for the young couple and took pity on them. She said to Jesus in a tone of request: "*They have no wine.*" But Jesus seemed quite indifferent to her appeal. "*What wouldst thou have me do, woman?*" he said, "*My hour has not yet come.*" One would have imagined from the coolness of this reply that it would have been useless to press the matter any further. Mary, on the other hand, was sure that Jesus would not refuse the favour which she asked. She turned without any hesitation to the attendants and directed them: "*Do whatever he tells you.*" As if disarmed

by his Mother's trustfulness, Jesus then worked His first miracle through her intercession. When we pray, we should do so with the same confidence, and we shall certainly be answered. Remember Mary's words, however. "*Do whatever he tells you.*" We must do whatever Jesus tells us if we want Mary to listen to us and to work in us the miracle of our sanctification. If we desire to be true sons of Mary, her advice to us is to carry out the commands of Jesus Christ.

3. Holy Mary, my loving Mother, hear my supplications and obtain for me from your divine Son all the graces of which I am in need. Obtain for me most of all the grace to become holy. Grant that I may do always and in all circumstances whatever Jesus tells me to do. Grant that my will may be in harmony with His most holy will and that my actions may be in accordance with His divine commandments. Amen.

¹ Sermo in Nativ. B.M.V., n. 7.

² In Assump. B.M.V. sermo 2, n. 2.

³ Super Miss. Homil., 2, n. 17.

⁴ Cf. John 2, 1-11.

3rd May

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS¹

1. After His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to His Apostles. For forty days He instructed them concerning the kingdom of God. When He had announced to His followers that He would send the Holy Spirit to give them the enlightenment and courage to preach the Gospel, they gathered together on the Mount of Olives and saw Him taken away from them and borne upwards until a bright cloud hid Him from their view. The mystery of the Ascension contains a lesson for us. We must be detached from the world and brought closer to Heaven, which is our true home. We are so attached to earthly things because money, reputation and pleasure are closer to our

hearts than the thought of God or of eternity. We shall have to leave all these things behind soon enough, however. When death comes, the world will slip away from us and the soul will stand alone before God. Let us begin to detach ourselves from worldly affairs and to make Heaven the object of our desires. Why should we be sorry or afraid to leave this earth? Remember the teaching of St. Paul. *Here we have no permanent city, but we seek for the city that is to come.*² *For me to live is Christ, he said, and to die is gain*³ . . . *desiring to depart and to be Christ, a lot by far the better.*⁴ Let us pray in the beautiful words of the Church: "Lord, grant that while we are living in this changing world we may aspire to the true happiness of Heaven, so that in the midst of earthly vicissitudes our hearts may be content in this ambition."⁵ Let us not be afraid of death, for it is only the gate of Heaven.

2. Meditate on the thoughts of St. Augustine concerning the mystery of the Ascension. "Dearly beloved brethren, our Saviour has ascended into Heaven. We who remain on earth should not be too troubled about this. Rather let us raise our thoughts to Heaven and we shall find rest there. Our hearts can ascend with Christ in the expectation that one day our bodies can also ascend. Let us remember, however, that our pride, avarice and sensuality cannot go up to Christ. None of our vices can find a place alongside our divine Healer. Therefore, if we wish to ascend to our divine Healer, we must cast off vice and sin. These are like fetters which hold us back and tie us to the ground . . . Even as the Resurrection of Christ is our hope, so His Ascension should be the beginning of our glorification . . . God is high above us. If you seek to reach Him with pride, He flies from you. If on the other hand you are humble, He comes down to meet you . . ."⁶ When we meditate on the Ascension, we should humbly ask God to give us the grace to strip ourselves of our sins and defects. Then we shall be able to fly towards Him with love and hope in this life, and when our soul has been set free from the body which imprisons it on earth we shall be able to set out on our last joyful flight into

His presence. These are the reflections which should be in our minds around the feast of the Ascension. These are the desires which we should foster and the resolutions which we should form. Let us ask Our Lord to bless them.

3. O Mary, my most holy Mother, implore of your divine Son Jesus, now ascended into Heaven, that I may be more detached from the useless and passing goods of this earth. Ask Him to purify my soul from every stain of sin and to strengthen my will in its good resolutions. Ask Him that my heart may rise nearer to God and to you through its desire for perfection. Amen.

¹ This meditation is suitable for the Feast of the Ascension.

² Heb. 13, 14.

³ Phil. 1, 21.

⁴ Ibid. 1, 23.

⁵ Breviar. Rom.

⁶ Sermo 2 de Ascens. Dom.

4th May

THE IMITATION OF MARY

1. Earthly mothers are delighted when they see a reflection of themselves in the features and mannerisms of their children. In the same way Mary, our Heavenly Mother, is pleased when her sons seek to reproduce as far as possible in their lives the faithful imprint of her spiritual motherhood. We should imitate Mary, therefore. Especially in this month which is dedicated to her, we should not be content merely to pray before her altar and decorate it with flowers, but we should make daily progress in imitating her virtues, particularly the virtue which we need most. We may be lacking in humility, that virtue which is so outstanding in Our Lady. Or perhaps we are lacking in purity, the most difficult yet the most necessary of all the virtues. Then again we may be wanting in acceptance of God's will when we are suffering or misunderstood. We should try and do God's will in everything and with perfect trust in Him, as Mary did

at Nazareth and at Bethlehem, in exile and in her own country, in her humble home and on the apostolic journeys in which she followed her divine Son, on the sorrowful way of the Cross, on Calvary at the feet of Jesus, at the Resurrection and glorious Ascension, and in the years in which she waited on earth for the final loving reunion in Heaven. Let us repeat with her always: *Be it done to me according to thy word.*¹ There is a story told about a holy man who prayed to Mary in all his difficulties: "Show yourself to be my mother." One day he heard the reply: "Show yourself to be my son." Mary says this to us as well. If we wish her to prove that she is our mother, we must show her that we are really her sons by mirroring in our lives her outstanding sanctity.

2. At first sight it seems a very difficult matter to imitate Mary. More than any other creature, she reached the highest peak of perfection. But if we examine the nature of her outstanding sanctity, it will seem easier to imitate her. According to the masters of the spiritual life, there are three kinds of holiness. First, there is extraordinary sanctity, which abounds in miracles and ecstasies, such as that of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Gemma Galgani, and many others. Secondly, there is ordinary holiness, where perfection is achieved without being manifested in miracles or in ecstasies. Thirdly, there is hidden sanctity, a relationship entirely between the soul and God, which consists in the faithful and loving fulfilment of His holy will. It is unnoticed by men, but one day it will shine forth in the sight of God and the human race.

The holiness of Mary falls into the latter two categories, for hers was a hidden sanctity, to outward appearances quite ordinary. We read nothing of her having been in ecstasy or having worked miracles. We do read, however, that she did God's will on all occasions; that she lived an obscure life of humility and love; that she followed Jesus as far as Calvary along the sorrowful

road of the Cross; that she loved Him above everything else; and that she lived for Him alone. It is not too difficult to imitate Mary. With her protection and with the grace of God, it can become almost easy. All we need is a firm resolution to accomplish the will of God in all things, a great love for Jesus which will make Him the object of all our actions, and a spirit of prayer which will keep us close to God in every kind of circumstance.

3. O holy Mary, ever ready to protect and assist me, grant that I may be as truly your son as you are my heavenly Mother. Grant that I may reproduce your most outstanding virtues, especially those which are most necessary for me to imitate. Help me to be humble, pure, and inflamed with love for God and for my neighbour. Obtain for me a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, and most of all a complete and absolute acceptance of the will of God.

¹ Luke 1, 38.

5th May

MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

1. The near-infinite greatness of Mary flows from the fact that she is the Mother of God. The Eternal Word of the Father, consubstantial with Him in nature and equal to Him in majesty, willed to become man in order to set us free from the slavery of sin and to regain Heaven for us. He became man in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary. He took a human body and soul and was born of her as the God-Man. For this reason there is attributed to His Divine Person the title of Son of Mary and to Mary the title of Mother of God.

There is a relationship between Mary and each of the three Divine Persons, for she is the daughter of God the Father, the

spouse of the Holy Spirit by whose power the Word became incarnate in her, and the mother of the Word made man. She is, moreover, in the words of Dante, the "termine fisso di eterno consiglio."¹ In other words, she is the centre of the eternal plan which God established for the redemption of the human race. It was God's eternal design to re-unite creation to the Uncreated by means of Mary. She became the mother of the Eternal Word, in whom the divine and human natures were indissolubly united. He redeemed us by His infinite merits, but in this work of redemption He employed the co-operation of His holy Mother. All the graces, privileges and virtues of Mary flow from this great mystery of her divine Motherhood. As befitted the future Mother of God, she was conceived free from the stain of original sin and full of grace. Her mortal life was a continuous ascent towards the highest peak of sanctity. When she died, she was assumed body and soul into Heaven, where she was crowned in glory as Queen of Angels and Queen of Saints.

When we consider the sublime nobility of Our Lady, we should be moved to love and venerate her. This love and veneration does not subtract in the slightest from God's glory, because she is the Mother of God. In fact, it is of great advantage to us to imitate her and to call on her to intercede for us.

2. St. Matthew² and St. Mark³ relate how Jesus was preaching one day in Galilee, surrounded by his Apostles and by a large crowd, when a man approached and said: "*Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside, seeking thee.*" "*Who is my mother,*" He answered, "*and who are my brethren?*" Then He extended His hand towards His disciples and said: "*Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.*" These words were directed at us, not at Our Lady. Not only was she the immaculate Mother of Jesus Christ, but she performed lovingly on all occasions the will of the heavenly Father. She did His will in poverty and obscurity, in exile, and on Mount Calvary. There-

fore she was God's mother in the spiritual as well as in the physical sense of the word, in so far as she was constantly united to Him by a bond of love and of conformity with His desires.

Christ's words indicate that Mary's perfect and continuous acceptance of God's will was even more pleasing to God than the dignity of the divine Motherhood. We cannot equal her in dignity, but we can imitate her in this other respect. Jesus will look on us as His brothers and as worthy sons of Mary if we carry out His will in all things. It is not always easy to do this. It is not easy when we are strongly tempted to commit sins of pride, anger or impurity. It is not easy when we are overcome by sorrow or by sickness, when we are let down or misunderstood by others, when we are in want, and when we feel that we are collapsing beneath the weight of our cross. At times like these we should pray for Mary's spirit of complete acceptance of the will of God.

3. Most Holy Mary, not only were you raised to the dignity of Mother of God, but you carried out His holy will heroically on all occasions. Obtain for me from your divine Son, Jesus, the grace to co-operate always and at all costs with His designs for me, both in life and in death. Amen.

¹ Parad., 33, 1-3.

² Cf. Mt. 12, 46-50.

³ Cf. Mark 3, 31-35.

6th May

MARY, OUR MOTHER

1. Let us imagine that we are on Calvary at the foot of the Cross. Jesus is nailed hand and foot to the wood and the last drops of blood are trickling from His wounds to the ground. His thorn-crowned head has nowhere to rest and the weight of His body is extending the wounds caused by the nails which hold it suspended between earth and sky. He has given everything for our salvation. He has given His commandments and

His sermons of instruction. He has given us His merits and the grace to apply them to ourselves. He has worked miracles to strengthen the faith of His disciples. He has given us the Sacraments; above all, He has given Himself in the Blessed Eucharist. Now at last He is giving His life for the redemption of men. What more could He give us? His eyes, misty with suffering, look down and see near the Cross the two beings whom He loves even more than the rest, His mother Mary and the Apostle John. All that is left for His infinite goodness to give us is His own Mother. He bestows on her a last loving look and says: "Woman, behold thy son." Then He turns to the beloved disciple. "Son," He says, "behold thy mother." Now He has surrendered everything, even His dearest affections. According to the interpretation of the Fathers and of the Church, in John we became from that moment the sons of Mary, and Mary became our Mother. We are her sons whether we remain faithful like the beloved Apostle or have become the slaves of sin. A mother does not cease to love her sons when she sees them being led astray by error or by vice. She loves them more than ever and does not give up appealing to them to return to the straight path. It should be a great consolation to us to realise that we have Mary as our Mother. She loves us very much and takes a maternal interest in us whether we are leading good lives or have fallen into sin. In life and in death she is our most powerful protectress.

2. Mary is at the same time our loving and powerful Mother. No matter how much earthly mothers love their sons and desire to help them, very often they cannot do so, because their love is limited. It is not so with Mary. Not only does she love us, but she also possesses great influence with her divine son, Jesus. We should have confidence in her, therefore, and have recourse to her in every spiritual or temporal need. We may be certain that she will use her powers of intercession on our behalf. Let us remember, however, to ask first of all for the spiritual favours

which we need. Later we may ask in a spirit of resignation to God's will for temporal benefits and for release from worldly suffering. If we acted otherwise, we should not be worthy sons of Mary, who endured all kinds of suffering for the sake of Jesus. When we recite the Our Father, we say "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven," before we say "Deliver us from evil." If anyone refuses the cross, he shows that he does not love God because he does not will what God wills for him. We should remember that there is no affliction which does not come from God and that nothing comes from God which is not for our own good. So let us ask Mary for everything which we desire, but let us ask her first of all to make us holy. Devotion to Mary, as St. Catherine of Siena assures us, is a mark of predestination.

3. Holy Mary, it is consoling for me to know that you are my Mother, who loves and protects me and intercedes with God on my behalf that I may obtain everlasting salvation. I desire to be your son and to love you and your Son Jesus more and more. I wish to imitate your virtues as far as possible, especially your complete acceptance in joy and in sorrow of the holy will of God. Amen.

7th May

THE VIRGIN PURITY OF MARY

1. It is a dogma of faith that Mary was always a virgin in body and in soul. According to the teaching of the holy Fathers, Mary would have renounced her dignity as Mother of God rather than lose her virginity. When the Archangel Gabriel appeared with the news of the great privilege which she was about to receive, Mary was afraid and asked meekly how she could become the Mother of God since she had promised to remain always a virgin. The Angel assured her that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that the eternal Word of

God would take human flesh in her and become her son. Only then did she bow her head and reply: "Be it done to me according to thy word." Mary's perpetual virginity is complemented by her purity and absolute immunity from sin. When we consider sin of any kind, says, St. Augustine, Mary must always be the one exception to it.¹ She was preserved free from original sin and possessed the fulness of grace. The devil never had any power over her spotless soul. Not even the slightest tarnish marred her virginal splendour. Free from the concupiscence which has disturbed our human nature, she was like a snow-white lily sparkling in the sunlight. Her mortal life was a continuous ascent towards the highest peak of holiness. It would be wrong to believe that the extraordinary privileges which God had granted her from her conception remained fixed and static like an acquired inheritance. On the contrary, her daily correspondence with God's gifts was as remarkable as her dignity. The most chaste Virgin Mary is a model for our imitation. We cannot obtain her privileges, but we should try and imitate her heroic and constant co-operation with the gifts of God.

2. Purity is the most beautiful of the virtues. It is a virtue which is admired by God and by men, even by the most corrupt. It is often said that it makes us like the angels, but in fact, looking at it in a particular way, it makes us superior to the angels. Since they have no bodies, the angels cannot sin against purity, while we have to fight many battles and overcome many temptations in order to preserve our chastity. Jesus had a very special love for this virtue. He chose to be born of a virgin and showed a particular affection for St. John, who was a dedicated celibate.

On one occasion He placed His hands on the head of a little child and said: *Unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*²

Unfortunately, the virtue of purity is as fragile as it is beautiful. It can be lost in a single moment of weakness. We must love this virtue as Mary loved it. We must be prepared to make any

sacrifice, even the most heroic, rather than lose it. Worldly charm and beauty attract us and the devil works hard to control our imagination and our affections. On account of the disturbance of original sin, the flesh is like a terrible weight retarding our spiritual advancement. Sometimes it seems as if it is irresistibly drawing us towards the abyss of impurity. But we need not be dragged down if we are prepared to fly from the occasions of sin and to pray to God and to our heavenly Mother for her intercession. We must always act at once, for there is no time to dally. It is fatal to remain inactive and allow temptation to make its way into our soul. This kind of battle, said St. Francis de Sales, is won only by soldiers who flee. We must fly from the occasion of sin no matter what sacrifice this entails. Jesus has warned us that it is better to enter Heaven without a hand or a foot than to be cast into hell. We know the remedies—instant flight, heroic sacrifice, and constant prayer. We can leave the rest to the grace of God and to the maternal protection of Mary.

3. O Mary, my heavenly Mother, I am so weak, yet the danger in which I find myself is so great. Turn your eyes of mercy upon me and come to my assistance. Most of all, do not allow the demon of impurity to seduce my soul. Grant that I may never yield to the temptations of the flesh. Protect for me the flower of my chastity until I can deliver it unsullied into the hands of Jesus in Heaven. Amen.

¹ Cf. *De natura et gratia*, c. 36.

² Mt. 18, 3.

8th May

THE HUMILITY OF MARY

1. The profound humility of Mary was commensurate with her high dignity. As Dante put it, she was the humblest and

noblest of creatures. *Umile ed altra più che creatura.*¹ None of the saints was humbler than Mary, just as none of them was greater. It was an Archangel who came down from Heaven and bowed before her as he praised her in the highest terms as "full of grace" and announced the unique dignity she was to receive as Mother of God. She bowed her head in turn and declared herself to be the handmaid of the Lord, ready to do His will in all things. Then she went to visit and congratulate her cousin Elizabeth, because she had heard from the Angel that she was to be the mother of the Precursor. When she arrived at the house, she was greeted by Elizabeth, with the words: "How have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Far from being flattered, however, Mary attributed all her glory to God and replied with the Magnificat, a hymn of praise and gratitude in God's honour. It was the same when Jesus was born in the manger at Bethlehem. There was a sudden brightness in the sky and the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will." But even though she held the Lord of Heaven and earth in her arms, the Blessed Virgin asked for nothing for herself. Her only desire was to do the will of God. The love of Jesus was enough for her. She did not seek her own glory, but the glory of God. Likewise on the weary journey into Egypt she was content because she was with Jesus, and in the obscure life of Nazareth she desired no other treasure but Her divine Son. During His public life she followed Him in silence. Once only she spoke in a submissive tone in order to ask a favour for others, but not for herself. It was at the wedding celebrations in Cana, when she asked for the first miracle in such a way that it was not even apparent that it was she who had wrung the favour from the filial heart of Jesus. It was always like that, up to the time of Calvary and the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost. She remained humbly in the background all the time. Now after her departure from this

earth, her humility has been gloriously crowned in the dogma of the Assumption and in her coronation as Queen of Angels and of Saints.

2. Unfortunately, we often look for our share of glory on earth. We wish to appear to others not only at our true value, but as much more than we are really worth. We imagine that the gifts and qualities which God has given us belong to ourselves, whereas they are entirely His. We like to put up a good appearance, to win praise and renown—in other words we want to have our reward upon this earth. We should remember, however, that if we look for our reward now, we shall not have it in Heaven. God sees when our motives in doing good are distorted, and when we appear before His judgment seat He will say to us: *You have received your reward.*² Let us be humble like Mary. Let us make God's glory rather than our own satisfaction the object of all our actions. It will sometimes happen that men will misunderstand us, perhaps even insult us. We are not forbidden to defend ourselves and explain our position. We may not have the heroic virtue of St. Francis de Sales, who remained silent when he was calumniated. But we should not be too disturbed by lack of understanding or slander nor should we be too elated by flattery. Only one thing should count with us, and that is the testimony of a good conscience before God. Everything else is passing and futile. Our humility will be tested by the inevitable opposition, sometimes jealous and malicious, which we shall experience on the part of other men. On these occasions we shall see if we are really meek and humble of heart like Jesus and our Blessed Mother.

3. O Holy Mary, you were humble in life even though you were the Mother of God. Obtain for me also the difficult virtue of humility. I know that it is the basis of all the virtues and draws the grace of God. You see how much I need to be humble.

Grant that God may be the centre of my mind and of my heart. Grant that His glory may be the object of all my actions and desires, and the chief purpose of my life. Amen.

¹ Par., 33, 2.

² Cf. Mt. 6, 2.

9th May

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES IN OUR LADY

1. The three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity shone like constellations throughout the life of Mary. *Blessed is she who has believed*,¹ St. Elizabeth said of her. Mary's life was one long act of faith and of love. She lived continuously in the presence of God, being united to Him by lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity. Her spirit of constant prayer was the result of her intense practice of these theological virtues. When the Archangel Gabriel came down from Heaven to bring her the tidings of her divine motherhood, he found her absorbed in prayer. When St. Elizabeth praised and called her the Mother of her Lord, Mary from the depths of her faith attributed everything to God and glorified Him in her "Magnificat." When the baby Jesus was born in the cave of Bethlehem, she adored Him with faith, hope and love as her God and future Saviour. When she realised that Herod was searching for her Son to put Him to death, she placed her confidence in Him. She fled with Him into Egypt and brought Him back later to their land, always with the same faith, hope and love. Her faith and hope were not weakened by the loss of Jesus in Jerusalem; only her mother's love was disturbed on this occasion. When it seemed in that hidden life of Nazareth that Jesus was leading a life of pointless silence, her faith and hope in Him did not fade, while her love grew greater from day to day. In the triumphs and sorrows of

His public life, she continued to practice to an extraordinary degree these three virtues—on the road to Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, at the removal of Our Lord's body from the Cross, at the tomb, at the glorious Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost. At last, when she was alone in this world without Jesus, these three virtues seemed to burn more brightly in her soul. She thought only of Jesus, hoped in Jesus alone, and loved Jesus alone. Then Jesus rewarded the lively faith, expectant hope, and flaming charity of His Mother, for on her assumption into Heaven these three virtues shared in her triumph and coronation.

2. We also possess the Christian faith, or at any rate believe that we possess it, for we often recite the Creed and were received at Baptism into the vast family of the Catholic Church. But is our faith alive? When a man is living his faith, he has a constant realisation of the presence of God, Who has created him, maintains him in existence, has redeemed him, loves him, and commands him to do good. Otherwise our faith is dead, for as St. James writes, *faith without works is dead.*² If our faith is not living, neither is our hope nor our charity. Let us examine ourselves thoroughly. Perhaps we do not think about God enough, and as a result our faith is weak. Perhaps we place all our hopes in earthly things and look for these passing pleasures which cannot satisfy our hearts. Perhaps we love ourselves and our possessions too much and have too little love for God, our only real good. It may be that we are constantly seeking our own interests and ease and are lacking in sincere and active charity towards our neighbour when he is in need, even though he is our brother in Jesus Christ and we should love him as ourselves. If this is the way matters stand we are not genuine Christians, for we have not the three theological virtues which should form the basis of our lives. Neither are we sincere sons of Mary, who possessed these three virtues in an outstanding manner. Let us examine ourselves with a view to forming a few good and earnest resolutions.

3. O Mary, my most holy Mother, grant that my life may be, like yours, a continual act of faith, hope, and charity towards God and my neighbour. Grant that my faith may be active, that I may hope only for the Heavenly reward which awaits me, and that my charity may never shrink from whatever sacrifices the love of God and of my neighbours may demand. Amen.

¹ Luke 1, 45.

² James 2, 26.

10th May

THE CARDINAL VIRTUES IN MARY

1. Mary's soul has been appropriately styled the garden of all the virtues. In it the three theological virtues were wonderfully interwoven with the four cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

As St. John Chrysostom observed, justice is nothing else but the perfect observance of all the commandments.¹ The Blessed Virgin obeyed all the commandments in her relations with God, to Whom she dedicated herself from the moment when she gained the use of reason. She obeyed them in her relations with her Son, Jesus Christ, for she reared and instructed Him with loving maternal care, even though she knew that He was God and had no need of her attention. She fulfilled them in her relations with men, for whose salvation she united her sufferings and her merits to the infinite sufferings and merits of our Saviour.

Furthermore, Mary was prudence itself. This virtue shines forth in all her words and in all her actions. When the Angel appeared in human form and told her that she was to be the Mother of God, she was not flattered nor complacent. She thought calmly about the mystery which had been announced to her and asked the Angel how it could come to be since she

had already consecrated her virginity to God. She pronounced her Fiat only when she was reassured by the Angel that through the intervention of the Holy Spirit she would be a virgin mother. This was the beginning of the miracle of the Incarnation. When she was greeted by St. Elizabeth as the Mother of the Lord, she did not boast about her distinction but composed a hymn of gratitude in which she attributed her glory to God alone. Mary's prudence is equally evident in her words of gentle reproof to Jesus after He had been lost and found again in the company of the Doctors. It is again obvious at the wedding celebrations in Cana, when she knew well how to snatch the first miracle from the heart of Jesus.

Mary possessed the virtue of temperance also, both in her external behaviour and in her perfect internal control over all her faculties. This was the result of her immunity from original sin, which has created such grave moral disorder in our poor human nature. This virtue was further perfected by the purity and holiness of her daily life.

Finally, the virtue of fortitude was Mary's to an heroic degree. But her fortitude was always calm and controlled. The elderly Simeon had foretold that the sword of sorrow would pierce her heart. Her whole life was interwoven with suffering and privation. From the manger in Bethlehem to the flight into Egypt, from the Circumcision, when Jesus first shed His blood, to the Hill of Calvary, where He gave all He had for our salvation, Mary offered her sufferings along with those of her divine Son for our redemption. Her fortitude never wavered, but was always serene, for her mind and heart were in constant communication with God.

2. Let us compare ourselves with Mary and consider how far we have succeeded in acquiring these virtues. If we are to possess fully the cardinal virtue of justice, we must direct all our thoughts, desires and actions towards God. Since everything comes from God, we should offer everything back to Him. If

we fail to do this, we are guilty of injustice towards God. We take for ourselves something which belongs to Him. We must also be just to our neighbour. It is not enough to be charitable only, because there can be no charity unless it is founded on justice. This justice should characterise our thoughts and judgments as well as our words and actions.

Have we the virtue of prudence? Prudence demands constant self-control. How often do we lose control over ourselves and say things which we ought not to say or do things which we ought not to do? Prudence is a splendid virtue which can be obtained by the grace of God, by living a life of union with Him. It necessitates constant vigilance over our faculties and passions in order to ensure that nothing will interfere with our rational conduct and with our observance of the commandments of God.

Interior temperance is simply the result of prudence in so far as it obliges us to master ourselves and to abstain from everything which could upset the proper order of our faculties in relation to one another and to God. If we are inwardly temperate, we shall show external temperance in our words and deeds. We shall abstain, in other words, from everything suggested by our lower nature which is contrary to the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church. This means we shall observe among other things the Church's laws of fast and abstinence. We shall keep away from dangerous amusements and from anything else which could be harmful to ourselves or to our neighbour.

Finally, we must imitate the fortitude of Mary. We must be brave in the face of temptation to sin, in suffering and in all the difficulties of life. Looking always towards Heaven, our true home, we shall find at last the peace and happiness which have no end.

3. Holy Mary, make the cardinal virtues flourish in my soul as they did in yours. May they light my way through life and

show me the way to Heaven. Protect me, my Mother, when I am in danger of losing any of these virtues, and obtain for me from your divine Son, Jesus, the grace which will nourish and restore them. Amen.

¹ Homil. 12 super Matth.

I Ith May

MARY'S PATIENCE

I. Many people who honour the Cross of Jesus Christ have no liking for their own cross. Many of those who pray fervently to Jesus crucified experience a sense of repugnance and rebellion when they are called upon to suffer with Him and to carry their own cross. But Jesus has said: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*¹ If a man does not love his own cross, he does not love the Cross of Jesus Christ. If we are to be true Christians, we must suffer with resignation and love. Mary gives us a wonderful example of this kind of loving patience. She is the Mother of Sorrows, because when Jesus was in agony for love of us on Mount Calvary, she knelt at His feet. From the depths of her stricken mother's heart she offered up her divine Son and united her own sufferings to the infinite merits of His passion and death. In this way she became the co-redemptrix of the human race. But she had already suffered in patience throughout the earlier part of her life. Let us recall to mind the coldness of her reception in Bethlehem, the birth of her infant Son in a damp cave, the persecution by Herod and the flight into Egypt, the daily privations in the home of Nazareth, the anxious devotion with which she followed our divine Redeemer on his long missionary journeys, and the day when He was finally betrayed and arrested.

She knew that her divine Son had it in His power to spare both Himself and her all this suffering and humiliation. Even when they lived in Nazareth, she knew that He had power to multiply loaves of bread, change water into wine, or annihilate His enemies. But she never asked Him to do any of these things. All she ever asked for was a life of intimacy with Jesus. She was happy to co-operate patiently with Him in the work of redeeming the human race. By humbly following Him as far as Calvary she merited to follow Him triumphantly into Heaven on the day of her Assumption.

2. We also have our share of suffering and humiliation. It is useless to try and escape from it, useless to rebel against it. If we embrace the cross patiently and lovingly, as Jesus and Mary did, it will seem lighter, even welcome. If we attempt to cast it from us, it will weigh more heavily on our shoulders. There are two kinds of men, those who bear their cross patiently and embrace it because they wish to be like Jesus, and those who do not want to suffer, and rebel. The former may stagger beneath their daily burden, but they have peace of soul because they are putting into practice the great Gospel precept: *By your patience you will win your souls.*² They know that they are on the path to Heaven and this thought is a consolation which cannot be taken from them. The second group of men rebel against the cross and therefore suffer doubly, in body and in soul. *The senseless man*, the Holy Spirit says, *loves not to be reproved.*³

To which of these two categories do we belong? Do we love our cross, or do we carry it patiently at least? Anyone who does not want the cross does not want Jesus. Let the example of Mary and of the Saints inspire us. They always bore their burden patiently, they even looked for suffering and humiliation. If we cannot reach such heroic heights, let us at least accept from the hands of Our Lord the cross which He offers us. Let us accept the sufferings which we meet on the way of life. If we are not

heroic enough to seek to be unknown and mortified, let us resolve to accept patiently the inevitable sorrows of life.

3. Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows, obtain for me the spirit of loving patience which made you the Queen of Martyrs. Help me to carry with resignation the cross which God has given me. Help me to walk like you in the footsteps of Jesus until I reach my Calvary, so that I may join Him and you in the glory of Heaven. Amen.

¹ Luke 9, 23.

² Luke 21, 19.

³ Prov. 15, 12.

12th May

THE SEARCH FOR GOD

1. There was a man who left home in order to travel. For many months he wandered on and on, sometimes along broad highways, sometimes on rocky by-roads. Often he travelled in hail, rain and snow, often beneath a burning sun, but no matter what the weather he journeyed on and on. He climbed the peaks of the highest mountains and came down again into the valleys. It seemed as if his journey would never end. One day, however, he grew very tired and sat down pensively by the side of the road. A passer-by approached him in a friendly fashion. "You look very tired," he said. "Have you been a long time travelling?" "A very long time," came the answer. "I don't seem to have any energy left." "But where are you going?" his new friend enquired. The traveller almost started. After a moment's consideration he replied in a tone of wonder: "Where am I going? I'm afraid I don't know!"

Many men, unfortunately, are like the traveller in this story. They have been a long time on the road. They can hardly remember when they first set out in search of a distant dream.

They are looking anxiously, but often unconsciously, for happiness: But they cannot find it, for happiness is a name for something greater, for God Himself. It is God whom we must seek if we wish to find happiness. Otherwise our earthly journey will have no purpose and no goal. Life is unintelligible without God. *You have made us for yourself, O God,* cried St. Augustine, *and our hearts will never rest until they rest in you.*¹ Jesus understands the problems of our human nature. *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,* He says, *and I will give you rest.*²

2. All men are looking for God, whether they are aware of it or not. They are discontented and cannot understand why. They do not realise that the real source of their discontent is that they have not found God, and God alone can make men happy. The Blessed Virgin had to put up with many sorrows, but she never had to bear the pain which afflicts the rest of us to a greater or lesser degree, the pain of separation from God. Even when she lost the Child Jesus, she still possessed God in her soul, for she had surrendered herself completely to Him. Throughout her life she remained united to God in joy and in sorrow. God's will was her will, His desires were her desires. If we wish to be worthy sons of Mary we must imitate her in this. Let us consider the nature of our most intimate thoughts and desires. How often we forget God! How little we really think of Him. We are absorbed in so many other affairs that we forget Him Who should be the centre of all our plans. We are too fond of ourselves and of our own comfort and interests. As a result, we forget Him to Whom we owe everything and Who should be the final goal of our lives. Our hearts are very small. If we fill them with worldly desires, there is no room for God. But God should be the absolute master of our souls. Let us empty ourselves of useless worldly preoccupation and make room for spiritual aims. Let us make room for God. If we look for Him in everything, we shall find Him.

3. Holy Mary, help me to aim at pleasing God throughout

my life. Help me to see Him in all things, to love Him in all my affections, to direct all my thoughts and desires towards Him. This is the only way in which I can become like you, my Mother. In this way I shall find peace on earth, even in the midst of suffering, and the happiness in Heaven which will never pass away. Amen.

¹ Confess., I, i, i.

² Mt. II, 28.

13th May

“ALL GENERATIONS SHALL CALL ME BLESSED”

I. A Jewish girl, poor in this world's goods but rich in virtue, arrived after a long and difficult journey at a village in the hills of Judea called Hebron. There she paid a visit to her cousin Elizabeth. When Elizabeth saw the girl, she was immediately enlightened by the Holy Spirit with the knowledge that her visitor was the Mother of God. *How have I deserved*, she cried out, *that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*¹ At these words Mary looked up towards Heaven and gave spontaneous expression to a hymn of humble acknowledgment to God Who had *regarded the lowliness of His handmaid.*² Then she made a solemn prophecy, which would surely have assured the cynical intellectuals and nobles of the land, but which history has wonderfully fulfilled. *Behold*, she said, *all generations shall call me blessed.*³ We can testify to-day that this miracle came to pass. All the nations have paid reverence to the Jewish girl, who became the Mother of God and our Mother, the Queen of Heaven and earth, the comforter of the afflicted, the conqueror of Satan, and the invincible guardian of the Church. From the engravings in the Catacombs to the celestial Madonnas of the Angelico, from the rudimentary sculpture of Roman art to the prayerful statues on

the pinnacles of more modern cathedrals, the image of Mary has shone as a beacon of hope for all generations. Men bow before her and ask for light, for comfort, and for pardon. *If any one follows Mary, says St. Bernard, he will not lose his way; if anyone prays to her he will not despair; if anyone thinks of her he will not sin; if anyone reaches out to her, he will not fall; if anyone places himself under her protection, he need have no fear; if anyone places himself under her leadership, he will never give up; if anyone pays homage to her, he is certain to reach his destination safely.*⁴

2. It is related in the Gospel that on a certain occasion a woman in the crowd was roused by the preaching and miracles of Jesus to cry out: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee.* But Jesus replied: *Rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.*⁵ These words take nothing from the glory of the Mother of God. They were not intended for her, but for us. She was great and holy not only because she was chosen to be the Mother of the Word Incarnate, but also because she perfected herself in virtue by carrying out in everything the teaching of her divine Son, Jesus. We cannot follow her as far as her high dignity of Mother of God, but we can follow her in her heroic practice of virtue. Admittedly, we shall not be able to climb to an equal height, but with the help of God and under Mary's own protection we can and should walk in her footsteps. We can imitate her humility, her purity, her lively faith, her burning love for God and for her neighbour, and her spirit of constant prayer and union with God. If we do this, we shall always feel that she is by our side as our loving Mother who is eager to help us to become holy.

3. O Mary, my loving Mother, I wish to add my voice to the millions of voices which have proclaimed your blessedness throughout the ages. Grant that my recognition of your sanctity may not be merely verbal, but may be proved by deeds. Let me do more than pray to you as my Mother, my Queen, and my powerful Mediatrix with God. Let me also acknowledge

that you are all this to me by a practical and filial imitation of your outstanding virtues. Amen.

¹ Luke 1, 43.

² Luke 1, 48.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Homil. "Missus est" 2, 17.

⁵ Luke 11, 27-28.

14th May

THE GREAT EXILE

1. God is the great exile. The majority of mankind have banished Him from public and private life. They do not want Him anymore; they do not even think of Him. There is even a minority which hates and curses Him. It is true that there are still faithful and generous communities, like oases in a vast and arid desert, which love God and even dedicate themselves to His service. But the great majority ignore Him. If they remember Him sometimes on important occasions, they do so vaguely and as a matter of form. They think of God as if He were a distant Being Who is not interested in their activities. Obviously, therefore, men no longer live the life of God. They live mechanically and obtusely, devoid of spiritual enlightenment or thought of Heaven. Their lives are like those of blind moles which reside in darkness beneath the ground without any desire to see the light of day. Bound to the earth as they are, they are afraid of the great concepts of eternity, the immortality of the soul, the last judgment, Heaven and Hell. "Since men's natural inclinations are towards worldly things," wrote Pope Pius XII, "his inability to understand the things of the Spirit of God is unfortunately aggravated in our times by the entire nature of his surroundings. Very often God is neither denied nor cursed, it is rather as if He were not there at all. There is constant and open propaganda in favour of a worldly life without God. Men live and die as if there were no such realities as God, redemption, or the Church."¹

This is, unfortunately, a true picture. The image of God is no longer seen in created things, in the arrangement of the universe, in the structure of the family and of society. All that men see is a great machine, but they do not wish to consider by whom it is set in motion. There is no longer any appreciation of God nor of His law; even the sense of sin has gone. Once the idea of God as the supreme lawgiver and judge has been taken away, men sin without shame and without restraint. Sin becomes an industry, a dishonourable business carried on by means of the press, cinema, television; and all the media of so-called modern civilisation.

Are you a victim of this unhealthy trend? What place does God hold in your mind and in the course of your life? We are heading for inevitable ruin if we allow ourselves to be swept away by the corruption of the world. Remember the frightening words of Jesus in the company of His disciples. *Not for the world do I pray*, He said, *but for those whom thou hast given me, because they are thine.*² Without Jesus, the world is racing towards utter destruction. It is terrifying, but that is the way it is.

2. Let us turn away from this spectacle of a corrupt and corrupting world and raise our fearful gaze towards Mary. What a contrast! She was wholly pure and beautiful. Her mind was always in contact with God. Her heart was full of the love of God and of her neighbour, whose redemption from the slavery of sin she ardently desired to achieve by co-operating with her divine Son. All her desires and actions were in harmony with the will of God, so that she lived completely in God. Let us think about ourselves. What place has Jesus in our approach to life? Let us try and think of Him more often. Let us meditate on the eternal truths, on the commandments of God and on the precepts of the Church which He has founded. Let us endeavour to make all our actions conform with these commandments. Above all, let us seek to love God more and more, and let us pray constantly for those countless souls who ignore and reject

Him. Then we shall be content in the midst of the trials of this world, for we shall have God in our hearts.

3.. Holy Mary, my Mother, grant that God may rule my mind and that you may be always in my thoughts. Help me to live always in the presence of God and to dedicate all my thoughts, desires and affections to Him. Grant that all the actions of my poor life may be in accordance with His Will. Amen.

¹ Discourses XI, 14.

² John 17, 9.

15th May

MARY, OUR HOPE

1. In the beautiful prayer known as the *Salve Regina* or *Hail Holy Queen*, the Church salutes Mary as "our life, our sweetness and our hope." Mary is our hope because she gave us our Saviour, Jesus, and because she prays to Him continually for the graces which we need. Following the example of Luther, modern Protestants raise the objection that Mary cannot be regarded as a source of hope because all our trust should be placed in God. Anyone who places his trust in creatures draws down God's curse upon himself, they say, and they go on to quote from *Jeremias*: *Cursed be the man that trusteth in man.*¹ But this is true only when we trust in creatures independently of God, as if we can derive any good from them without recourse to God. We invoke Mary, however, as the Mother of God and our mediatrix with Him. She is our hope in so far as she obtains for us from God the graces and favours which we require. St. Bernard assures us that God has placed in Mary's hands all the riches which He wishes to bestow on us.² "He will never experience eternal ruin," says St. Anselm, "for whom Mary has once prayed." St. Bernard calls upon Mary as the foundation of

all his hope.³ Let us remember that Mary is our loving Mother who wishes us to pray to her because she knows that if she intercedes on our behalf, she will certainly be heard. It should be most consoling to us to have such a good and powerful Mother in whom we can safely trust in every peril and in every necessity. Let us pray to her with love and faith in the certainty that we shall be answered in the way that is best for us. Let us say along with St. John Damascene: *O Mother of God, if I place my trust in you I shall be saved. If I am under your protection, I have nothing to fear, because to be devoted to you is to possess a weapon of salvation which God grants only to those whom He desires to redeem.*⁴

2. These expressions of confidence in Mary's powerful intercession should not lead us astray, however. They hold good with absolute certainty only for those who have true devotion to Mary. Even if they are sinners, such clients of Mary must have at least the good intention of changing their lives and never offending God anymore. Sin and sincere devotion to Our Lady cannot co-exist. "Relinquish every intention of sinning," St. Gregory VII wrote to the Princess Matilde, "and you will find Mary more eager to help you than any earthly mother."⁵ We should ask, furthermore, for spiritual favours first of all. Later we can ask for temporal favours if they are to our spiritual advantage. Finally, if we are to have a true devotion to Mary, we must love and imitate her as well as pray to her. Anyone who sincerely tries to do all this is certain of salvation.

3. O Mary, my Mother, I place my trust in you because I know that your intercession is all-powerful with your divine Son, Jesus. Help me to detach myself completely from sin and to conquer my rebellious inclinations. Grant that I may imitate the shining example of your sanctity in such a way that you may be truly my hope and my sure refuge now and at the hour of death. Amen.

¹ Jer. 17, 5.

² Serm. de aquaed.

³ Serm. de aquaed.

⁴ Serm. de Nat., cap. 4.

⁵ Lib. 1, Ep. 47.

THE REFUGE OF SINNERS

1. "Refuge of sinners, pray for us." This is one of the most beautiful invocations in the Litany of Loreto. In the second half of the Hail Mary the Church, knowing that we are all sinners, teaches us to pray to our heavenly Mother: "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." When a mother sees her sons going astray or behaving badly, she does not cease to love them. One might say that she loves them all the more, because in addition to her natural affection she develops a sense of anxious compassion for them when she thinks of the way in which they have risked their eternal salvation by sinning. Mary's attitude to us is like this. The only difference is that our earthly mothers suffer as a result of our transgressions and ingratitude without being able to do much to change us. Mary, on the other hand, being the Mother of Jesus as well as our Mother, is not only willing but able to help us. No matter how enormous our sins may be, no matter how irresistible our carnal instincts may seem, no matter how hopelessly we may have plunged into the depths of evil, it is enough for us to raise our eyes in confidence towards Mary. Like a merciful Mother, she will obtain for us from God forgiveness and the strength to return to the path of penitence and of peace. *Poor ship-wrecked sinners*, says St. Bonaventure, *have recourse to Mary and she will lead you to the port of salvation.*¹ Our good Mother, St. Bernard tells us, does not shrink in horror even from the most wretched of sinners. He need only turn to her for help and she will save him from damnation.² How comforting it should be for us to realise that we have such a merciful and powerful Mother. Let us turn to her with trust and humility and she will certainly assist us.

2. Mary is called the Star of the Sea because, as St. Thomas says, *even as sailors are guided into port by means of a star, so Christians are guided towards Heaven by means of Mary.*³ This

absolute guarantee of the protection of our heavenly Mother should increase our trust in her and lead us to turn towards her in every difficulty and temptation. It should not, however, result in an unhealthy attitude of spiritual inactivity, a passive dependence on Mary's favours without any co-operation on our part. Such behaviour would be the height of filial ingratitude. Mary will certainly save repentant sinners who have recourse to her, but she cannot pay any attention to hardened sinners who pray to her with their lips while their hearts remain wilfully steeped in sin. We must have complete confidence in her, but we must also have a sincere intention of raising ourselves under her protection from the slavery of sin to the friendship of God.

3. Mary, my merciful mother, you see how wretched I am and how often I have fallen. I wish to reform and sanctify myself, but I am not able. Without your powerful assistance, the weakness of my nature is an insurmountable obstacle. Come to my aid, O Mother of mercy. Obtain forgiveness for me from your divine Son. Obtain for me also the grace of a complete change of heart, so that I may be truly your son here upon earth and share in your glory in Heaven. Amen.

¹ In Ps. 8.

² Or. Pan. ad B. V.

³ Opusc. 7.

17th May

LIVING THE GOSPEL

1. The Gospel teaches perfection. It teaches the perfection of the interior as well as the exterior life, of private as well as of domestic and social life.

There is no problem in the universe which has not been solved in the Gospel. In regard to the spiritual life, its command is clear. *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹ *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*² *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I*

*have loved you.*³ *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*⁴ *Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . the clean of heart . . . the peacemakers . . .*⁵ *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*⁶ *Our Father who art in heaven . . . thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*⁷ *Father . . . not my will but thine be done.*⁸ Anyone who identifies himself with these maxims rises above the level of a man to that of an angel. His interior life soars to such a peak that he seems to be leading a heavenly rather than an earthly existence. If he is living the Gospel, moreover, his external behaviour will be a faithful mirror of his interior life, for it is not enough to say "Lord, Lord," but a man must also do the will of the Father.⁹ A man's domestic and social life will follow the pattern of his private life. When he has reached the summit of perfection, an invisible force will emanate from him, the force of good example. This force will transform everything within him and around him. Like Mary and the Saints, he will become the loyal and powerful co-worker of Christ in the redemption of the human race and in the Christian transformation of society. Redemption and restoration can come only through the Gospel. Other theories are always bound up with and impeded by human egoism. The doctrine of the Gospel is reinforced by the love of God and of our neighbour. In the Gospel public and private justice is transformed into the charity of Christ which cannot be impeded by any earthly difficulty nor by any human barrier, not even by death. *Who shall separate us from the charity of Christ?*¹⁰ asks St. Paul. Let us meditate on this.

2. The doctrine of the Gospel is so sublime that no generation has yet been able to practise it fully. Only the Blessed Virgin and the Saints have approached the peak of perfection indicated by Christ. *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹¹ How far have we advanced? We are not expected, obviously, to achieve the absolute perfection of our heavenly

Father. But we are obliged to strive towards it with the help of the grace of God. It may be that our particular circumstances excuse us from fulfilling the evangelical counsels, but we have no option but to obey the precepts of the Gospel. We are under no obligation to sell all our possessions and give the money to the poor, but it is too bad for us if our hearts are not detached from earthly things and in contact with God. We must be prepared to face the consequences if we do not observe the precepts of justice and charity towards God and our neighbour. We are especially obliged to help those who are in need of any kind with whatever we have to spare in the way of material assistance or advice. It is our own misfortune, too, if we do not mortify ourselves, accept the will of God even in suffering, and empty our hearts of worldly attachments in order to fill them with spiritual preoccupations. Let us remember that we belong to God. All our thoughts and desires should, therefore, be directed towards God alone.

3. Most Holy Mary, you sought always to reflect in your own soul the beauty and sanctity of your divine Son by obeying His teaching in a heroic manner. Obtain for me the grace to be detached from worldly affairs, especially from sin. Let me be prepared to make any sacrifice which is necessary in order to follow the Gospel precepts, so that the image of our divine Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, may be faithfully imprinted upon my soul, even as it was so wonderfully portrayed in yours. Amen.

¹ Mt. 5, 48.² Mt. 22, 37; Mark 12, 30; Luke 10, 27.³ John 15, 12.⁴ Luke 9, 23.⁵ Mt. 5, 3-10.⁶ Mt. 19, 21.⁷ Mt. 6, 10.⁸ Luke 22, 42.⁹ Cf. Mt. 7, 21.¹⁰ Rom. 8, 35.¹¹ Mt. 5, 48.

18th May

THE POWER OF MARY

1. "Virgin most powerful, pray for us." This is one of the invocations to Our Lady in her Litany. Mary's power derives

from her divine Motherhood. The Eternal Word was made man in her most chaste womb. By assuming our human nature in the Hypostatic Union, He became her Son. In the same way as a mother can give instructions to her son, Mary can pray to Jesus with full confidence that she will be answered. Not only has she the power of love over Him, but also the power of a mother. Her prayers have the force of a command and it is impossible for them to go unheeded. When Mary seeks a favour from her divine Son for us who are her adopted sons, says St. Peter Damian, she commands rather than prays; she is more like the mistress than the handmaid of the Lord.¹ Some ecclesiastical writers go as far as describing Mary as being omnipotent in grace and in intercession even as God is omnipotent by reason of His nature. *O Mother of God*, writes St. Gregory of Nicomedia, *you have such invincible power that the multitude of our sins can never exhaust your mercy. Nothing can resist your power, for your Creator regards your glory as His own.*² This doctrine should console even the most hopeless sinners. It is enough to have loving recourse to Mary and we shall be sure of salvation.

2. We should turn confidently to Mary especially when we are tempted. She cannot allow us to offend her Jesus and to fall into the toils of the devil as long as we pray to her with faith in her intercession. *The devil, as a roaring lion*, says St. Peter, *goes about seeking someone to devour.*³ But our mother Mary is always by our side seeking to protect us. Let us entrust ourselves to her maternal care. Not only does Mary wish to help us, declares St. Bonaventure, but those who do not pray to her commit almost as great an offence as those who openly insult her.⁴

3. O Mary, my powerful and merciful Mother, my soul is constantly troubled by temptations. I am standing on the edge of the chasm. I promise to place myself at once under your maternal protection. Grant that I may never fall into sin again. Cast your merciful eyes upon me and save me when I am tempted. Grant that temptations may never again endanger the

purity of my soul by obtaining for me from God a lively spirit of faith, a burning love for Him and for you, a constant watchfulness over my senses and over worldly dangers, and the gift of fervent and persevering prayers in union with you and your divine Son, Jesus. Amen.

¹ Serm. 41 de Nativ. ² Orat. de Exitu B. Virg.

³ 1 Peter 5, 8. ⁴ In Spec. Virg.

19th May

PRAYER AND OUR LADY

1. *He told them a parable—that they must always pray and not lose heart.*¹ Nobody else on earth ever carried out this command of Our Lord as perfectly as Our Lady. St. Albert the Great says that, after Jesus Christ, the spirit of prayer is to be found at its most perfect in Our Lady.² It was because of her immense love for her divine Son that Mary was able to put into practice throughout her life the Gospel precept of unceasing prayer. Prayer in its fullest sense is in fact an act of love rather than of supplication. It is defined as an elevation of the soul to God, to adore and praise Him, to thank Him, and to ask Him for His favours. It leads to lasting and intimate union with God, who should be regarded as our only good and as the final end of our lives. Since Mary was full of grace, she was always close to God. Even before she became His Mother, she constantly enjoyed His intimacy. Despite the many sorrows of her life, this intimacy became still greater and more beautiful when she became the Mother of Jesus. From that time she was able to hold Him to her immaculate bosom and to live in close familiarity with Him. She was able, too, to follow Him on His apostolic journeys until He reached Calvary and the Cross, and finally to see Him

gloriously risen from the dead. After Jesus had ascended into Heaven, her soul expanded with a nostalgic love for her divine Son until her earthly journey was over and she was taken up into Heaven. There she reigns supreme among the Saints and Angels and never ceases to pray for us, her exiled children, who need her help so much. Let us learn from Mary how to pray with love and perseverance. Then we shall be able to follow her along the difficult way of perfection which leads towards Heaven.

2. Mary's was a life of constant prayer. It is a thousand times more necessary that ours should be the same. We are so weak and so prone to temptation that we are always in danger of falling into sin. *Without me you can do nothing*,³ Jesus tells us. *I am the vine, you are the branches . . . If anyone does not abide in me, he shall be cast outside as the branch and wither.*⁴ *Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.*⁵ In short, Jesus asks us to pray. He wants us to pray because He wants to give us His graces. We cannot object that it is impossible for us to pray all the time because we have to work and fulfil other obligations. The work which has first claim on us is the service of God, which is prayer. Secondly, we can pray in the course of our daily work and of our different occupations by offering to God everything which we do. No matter what we are doing, we can raise our minds to God in an act of love and so remain always close to Him. It is not our work which prevents us from praying constantly, but our attachment to worldly things, our excessive love of ourselves and of other creatures. We must avoid these distractions if we wish to live like Mary in a continual state of prayer.

3. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me that spirit of prayer which will keep me always close to God. I know that sin can never conquer me if I remain united to God. I know if my heart is filled with the desire of heavenly gifts, there will be no room in it for useless or sinful affections. I wish to follow your example and live a life of prayer and recollection. But I am very weak

and unstable. Please obtain for me the gift of constant and persevering prayer and grant that I may never lose it. Amen.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

² Sup. Miss., 80.

³ John 15, 5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mt. 7, 7.

20th May

A LESSON FROM SCRIPTURE

I. The following is a passage from one of St. Paul's letters to his disciple, Timothy: *Godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and certainly we can take nothing out; but having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content. But those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many useless and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and damnation. For covetousness is the root of all evils, and some in their eagerness to get rich have strayed from the faith and have involved themselves in many troubles. But thou, o man of God, flee these things; but pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness. Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal . . .*¹

These words may seem hard, but they are very true. All the evils of the world spring from an excessive longing for earthly possessions and from self-love. How far apart are the Gospel and modern life. Those who can afford to do so lead lives of luxury and of pleasure, while those who cannot are tormented by the desire to do the same. For many people life has become a weary pursuit of money, pleasure and reputation, and when they fail to achieve these they rebel against everybody and everything. This is a quest, St. Paul reminds us, which leads to "destruction and damnation."²

Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, Jesus tells us in the Gospel, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life a greater thing than the food, and the body than the clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow, or reap, or gather into

barns: yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? . . . Consider 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. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which flourishes to-day but to-morrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you of little faith! Therefore do not be anxious, saying: "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "What are we to put on?" . . . for your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given to you besides.³

The teaching of the Gospel and of St. Paul does not forbid us to look after our affairs carefully. It only forbids us to become obsessed with worldly matters and to live without trust in Divine Providence. It tells us not to fret about things which should not be the goal of our lives and cannot satisfy our hearts which were made for God. St. John Bosco's great principle was that a man should work as if he were never going to die, but live as if he were about to die very shortly.

2. Mary lived a life of poverty and suffering even though she was close to Jesus, Who could have made her wealthy and happy on this earth by a single act of His will. But she never asked her divine Son for worldly happiness. She regarded Jesus as her only treasure and her happiness consisted in perfect obedience to the will of God. When she arrived in Bethlehem with her holy spouse, St. Joseph, she could not find room in the inn nor in any of the houses. This did not matter to her. She found refuge in a stable and there she gave birth to Jesus, the only treasure of her life.

When Herod planned to kill the Divine Infant, Mary did not ask for a miracle in order to escape, but undertook a long and difficult journey into exile. Only once did she ask her Divine Son for a miracle. Then it was not for herself, but for the newly-married couple at Cana, who had run short of wine. What is our attitude? How important are worldly matters to us? What

place has God in our hearts? Are we chasing after money, pleasure and success? If we worry a great deal about these things we shall suffer torment and disillusionment. The final disillusionment will be the restlessness of our hearts, which can find peace and lasting happiness in God alone.

3. O Mary, my most holy Mother, free me from useless desires and from an excessive longing for worldly things. Help me to think always of Heaven. Grant that I may find my happiness in God as you did by acting in perfect accordance with His holy will. By loving Him above everything in the world, may I one day enjoy with you the everlasting happiness of Heaven. Amen.

¹ 1 Tim. 6, 12.

² 1 Tim. 6, 9.

³ Cf. Mt. 6, 25-34.

21st May

CONTEMPLATION AND OUR LADY

1. True contemplation has its origin in love, for when love is intense it gives a clear insight into that which is loved. It is never the result of mere learning, which can be cold and uninspiring and therefore unable to give us a vision of the truth. Many are learned without love, while there are others who have no learning but love God and contemplate Him with a spiritual joy which is a prelude to the happiness of Heaven. Contemplation is not, therefore, a gift of learning. Even an illiterate man can have it, while those who study a great deal may be without it. For the most part, it is the gift of divine grace. This is not to deny that the knowledge of sacred things, especially of theology, can promote contemplation. It can help, as long as it is not the kind of learning which makes a man proud but rather leads him nearer to God. This is what St. Paul meant when he said that *knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies.*¹

Contemplation, then, begins in the love which is based on humility and on prayer. The contemplative must always look for

the help of divine grace without ever presuming on his own powers and without fooling himself that he has made any progress of his own accord. It does not matter whether he is an ignorant or a learned man as long as he sees the reflection of God in all things and comes to know and love Him. Then, under the influence of divine grace, contemplation flows from the loving knowledge of God. The Blessed Virgin was created and conceived full of grace and endowed with more supernatural privileges than any other creature. Therefore she knew and loved God in a higher way than any of the Cherubim or Seraphim. It is only to be expected, then, that she would have had the gift of contemplation. Her prayer was an intimate conversation with God. We have an example of this kind of contemplative prayer in the hymn which she composed when she became the Mother of the Word Incarnate. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid; for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed . . .*² In Mary, however, the contemplative life was united to the active life. This was so whether she was in the house in Nazareth, or following Jesus on His apostolic journeys, or co-operating with the Apostles in their great mission during her last years on earth.

2. We must try and unite the active with the contemplative life as far as circumstances will allow. St. Thomas says that the perfection of the spiritual life consists precisely in this union of activity and contemplation. One without the other falls short of perfection. *It is greater to enlighten than simply to shine*, writes St. Thomas, *and greater to pass on the fruits of contemplation to others than merely to contemplate.*³

Contemplation on its own can degenerate into useless day dreaming. It is necessary that it should produce a genuine interior transformation as a result of which the subject, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, becomes in his speech and in his conduct a man of God. Now, the man of God is not satisfied with enjoying

spiritual consolations, but is moved by his zeal for the glory of God to try and extend His kingdom by every possible means. It is in this way that contemplation becomes apostolic action.

We must remember, on the other hand, that neither is action on its own sufficient. It can become barren when it is not nourished by the interior life of grace which is the source of prayer and contemplation. It cannot be held that this last is the exclusive gift of a few privileged souls. Anyone can have it as long as he allows himself to be penetrated by the love of God and as long as he succeeds in securing moments of silence and recollection at intervals during life. In these moments he will grow closer to God and will enjoy a foretaste of the happiness of Heaven.

3. O Mary, my most holy Mother, obtain for me a great love for God, which will lead me closer to Him in all my actions. Even if I have not got the extraordinary gift of contemplation, grant that this love may live so powerfully in me that it will pervade all my actions. Then I shall be able to live in constant union with God and act in perfect accordance with His holy will. Amen.

¹ I Cor. 8, 1.

² Luke 1, 46-48.

³ St. Th., II-II, q. 6, a. 3.

22nd May

MARY, THE SOURCE OF PEACE

1. Mary is surrounded by an atmosphere of peace. The countenance of the Virgin-Mother reflects the serenity of her soul. She was conceived free from original sin and endowed with every grace and with every supernatural gift. There was no struggle in her between good and evil, for this conflict is the effect of concupiscence. She never experienced the rule of sin of which St. Paul complains. *I see another law in my members, says St. Paul, warring against the law of my mind and making me*

*prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*¹ It was quite otherwise with Mary. Her lower inclinations were completely subject to her spiritual faculties, which were in their turn perfectly submissive to the commands and inspirations of God. Nevertheless, while she enjoyed complete interior harmony, Mary had to endure external conflict and suffering. Holy Simeon foretold that the sword of sorrow would pierce her heart. In fact, her life was altogether interwoven with hardship, want and suffering until, eventually, she knelt at the foot of the Cross on which Jesus was dying for the love of mankind and offered the divine Victim for our salvation. At the last moment, however, torn with sorrow though she was, she did not depart in the slightest from her spirit of perfect acceptance of God's will. Consequently, her peace of soul was never diminished or extinguished. Let us learn from her to accept everything from God's hands, both the tiny pleasures which brighten our lives from time to time and the humiliations, sufferings and death which it pleases God to keep in store for us.

2. If we wish to possess this true peace which only God can give, we must control and regulate the movements of our passions when they rebel against the soul. In other words, as St. Augustine says, our lower appetites must obey our reason, and this in its turn must be subject to its author, God.² Real peace can only come to us as the result of the hard and constant labour of subordinating our passions to right reason and our reason to God. "And this is the peace," Augustine writes, "which God gives on earth to men of good will; this is the most perfect wisdom."³ We have found from sad experience that sin and the free play of the passions cannot give us real peace, because *there is no peace to the wicked.*⁴ When by the grace of God and the assistance of Our Lady we have subdued our rebellious inclinations, it is necessary for us to go further and abandon ourselves completely into the

hands of God, asking Him for a spirit of absolute conformity to His will on all occasions. This is the price which we must pay to enjoy that peace which the world cannot give and which God gives only to those who do His holy will in all things.⁵ It may seem that the way to acquire this peace is very difficult, but there is no other way. Let us pray to Our Lady. She has won peace and victory for the Church on many occasions; for example, against the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, and at Vienna in 1683. In the same way she will obtain for us, her children, interior peace of soul, the greatest treasure which we can possess on earth.

3. Mary, my most sweet Mother, in your immaculate soul there reigned that true peace which is nourished by God's grace and by complete obedience to His will. Obtain for me from your Son, Jesus, victory over my evil inclinations and resignation to the sufferings of life and to death itself. Then, following your holy example, may I also be able to acquire that interior peace which will one day be perfect and everlasting in Heaven. Amen.

¹ Rom. 7, 23-25.

² De Serm. Domini, I, 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Is. 48-22.

⁵ Cf. John 14-27.

23rd May

MARY, A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

I. Let us imagine for a moment that we have grown blind and are for ever plunged in darkness. It is an unhappy thought. Never again to see those who are dear to us, never to see the light of the sun nor any of the splendour of the universe. We should feel as if were alone, for we should have to depend only on sounds and on the voices of others for communication with the external world. As St. Augustine points out, however, in his commentary on the miracle of the man who had been blind from birth, we are all more or less blind in the supernatural

order. The world is the image of God, but do we see His presence in everything which surrounds us? Is it not more often the case that created things distract us and lead us to forget their Creator, because we regard them as a means of satisfying our own comfort and our own ego? We should look on creatures as go-betweens which help us to ascend to God, the beginning and end of all creation.

Unfortunately, instead of climbing this mystical ladder which leads us to God, we often descend it. We forget God and become excessively wrapped up in worldly affairs. Sometimes matters may be even worse; not only do we forget God through our love of creatures, but we use them to offend Him. God has given us eyes to admire His works and, as a result, to lead us to praise, thank, and love Him. Instead, we often use this wonderful gift in order to commit sin. He has given us the gift of speech, the gift of hearing, and other senses. But how do we employ them? The tongue is a marvellous invention, but, as St. James writes, *if anyone does not offend in the word, he is a perfect man, able also to lead round by a bridle the whole body . . . With it we bless God the Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so.*¹ What can be said of vision and of speech can be said of all the senses and faculties of body and soul. They are all God's gifts and should therefore be used as means of bringing ourselves closer to Him. If creatures lead us away from God and cause us to forget Him, or if, worse still, they cause us to offend Him, then we are spiritually blind and far more unfortunate than those who have lost their natural vision.

2. When Allesandro Manzoni was a young man, he became a prey to error and to passion. One day he was walking thoughtfully through the streets of Paris when he found himself standing before a church. He shook his head when he saw it, then hesitated, and at length resolutely entered. He knelt in front of the altar

and, with a sense of confusion, looked up at the statue of the Madonna. He buried his face in his hands and prayed. It was the first time he had prayed for years. After a little while he left the church a changed man, and changed for ever! In spite of his extraordinary talents, even he had been a poor blind man. The grace of God, obtained for him through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, restored to him *the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.*²

Most of us are spiritually blind to a greater or less degree. If we are, let us go to Mary. Our good Mother will obtain for us the light and grace of God, for she has always been a burning torch, illuminating the port of salvation for countless souls lost in the darkness of error and of vice. There have been so many whose minds were tormented by doubt and darkened by sin, and as soon as they knelt and prayed before her altar, they received from her the enlightenment, consolation, and strength of faith and virtue which they needed in order to begin a new Christian life. Let us do the same and this month of Mary will be a new and sincere beginning for us.

3. Most holy Mary, during your earthly pilgrimage you never once lost sight of God. Grant that I may not be lost in the darkness of this world. Grant that I may not be ensnared by the passing charm and false beauty of these created things which surround me. Grant that I may see in all things the presence and beauty of God, so that I may always continue to advance nearer and nearer to Him. Amen.

¹ James 3, 2-10.

² John 1, 9.

24th May

MARY, THE SOURCE OF HOLINESS

1. God is the primary origin of all holiness. But the Blessed Virgin gave us Jesus, Who is our Redeemer, and the author of

grace. For this reason she may be called the source of grace, the divine aqueduct, as St. Bernard puts it, through which the supernatural life of grace is brought to us.¹ She was, moreover, full of grace and outstanding in holiness; as the Mother of God she can obtain anything for us from her divine Son, because *it is the will of God that we receive everything through the hands of Mary.*² Thirdly, even by her example she can be the source of sanctity for us. If we study her amazing humility, we shall learn to be humble, for our sinfulness gives us such good reason to humble ourselves. If we meditate on her spotless purity we shall experience a great desire and love for this beautiful virtue and shall have recourse to her in every danger to save us from impurity. Then let us reflect on her ardent love for God and for men. Her charity prompted her maternal heart to offer up as a divine Victim her Son nailed to the Cross. If we reflect on the nature of her charity, we also shall feel urged to love God above all things and to pray, work, and make sacrifices for the salvation of our fellowmen. Let us have always before our minds the image of our heavenly Mother and we shall be inspired to seek perfection in all our actions.

2. Since we are Mary's sons, we should try and reproduce her holiness in ourselves. Although it is higher than that of the angels, her sanctity is easy to imitate. There is no record that she ever had ecstasies or worked miracles. Hers was a perfect internal sanctity, consisting of total conformity with the will of God and an intense love for Him. We must aspire to this kind of holiness and model our lives upon it. There is no point in arguing that it is sufficient to be good Christians and that it is not necessary to be holy. A Christian, to be truly such, must be holy.

St. Paul referred to the early faithful as saints.³ *You are a chosen race*, said St. Peter, *a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people,*⁴ and he recalled to them the admonition of the Holy Spirit: *You shall be holy, because I am holy.*⁵ *You are to be perfect,*

Jesus Himself had commanded, *even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*⁶ This was the reason, He indicated, why He had come into the world—that *they may have life, and have it more abundantly.*⁷ This is the purpose of the Gospel, and this must be the purpose of our lives. Some day we shall either be holy, or we shall be damned. We shall either be saints in Heaven or condemned for ever in Hell. This truth merits careful thought; everything else is passing, but this is something which will never pass away. This command to sanctify ourselves is a reality which is present at every moment of our lives. Let us do our best to obey it at any cost.

3. Mary, my Mother, you are all-holy. You gave Jesus to us and received from Him the rôle of Mediatrix of His graces. Ask of your divine Son that we may always be able to avoid the slightest trace of sin and to devote all our thoughts, affections and actions to becoming holy. Amen.

¹ In adv. Domini, Serm. 2, n. 5.

² S. Bern., In Nativ. B.M.V., Serm., n. 7.

³ Eph. I, 1.

⁴ I Peter 2, 9.

⁵ I Peter I, 16. Lev. II, 44.

⁶ Mt. 5, 48.

⁷ John 10, 10.

25th May

HOLY PURITY

1. Have you ever experienced the sheer delight of climbing the mountains on a summer's day and coming across one of those little alpine lakes, a tiny mirror reflecting the still blueness of the sky? Or have you ever watched an infant smiling in its angelic slumber and been held spellbound by this vision of innocence? Finally, on some calm, clear night, surely you have studied the star-spangled sky and have been so overwhelmed by the beauty of the scene that you could have cried out with the

Psalmist: *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.*¹ These are only faint images of the beauty and virginal purity of Mary. Her soul was the purest and most beautiful of the entire human and angelic creation, because nobody else was ever raised to the dignity of the Motherhood of God. She was conceived free from all taint of original sin and enriched with every grace. In her chaste womb she conceived the Infant Jesus. Later she held Him close to her heart; she lived for Him and eventually died for love of Him.

Purity is a virtue which is attractive to everybody, even to those who are evil themselves or to those who have lost their own chastity. We love and desire this virtue, but are we prepared to make any sacrifice in order to preserve it in the manner demanded by our particular state in life? *The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, Jesus said, and the violent have been seizing it by force.*² This is especially true in regard to the acquisition of the virtue of purity. It is not enough to desire it; we must be willing to make sacrifices in order to acquire it.

2. Since Mary excelled so much in this virtue and had so great a love for it, she will obtain for us from God the grace necessary for us to preserve it, as long as we pray humbly to her, especially in time of temptation. Let us remember that at Baptism we became members of the Mystical Body of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit.³ We are obliged to avoid defiling this temple and making the Mystical Body of Christ a dwelling-place for the devil. It is not true to say that this is an impossible fight. We know from our own experience that we can win. We have often battled with or fled from occasions of sin. We have prayed and made sacrifices in order to win, and with the help of God and the protection of the Blessed Virgin we have won. After our victory we have felt elated and have experienced that peace which only God's grace can bestow. If we have succeeded so many times, why cannot we do the same always? There is no need to be afraid. If we do all that we can, God's

grace will do the rest. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me,*⁴ says St. Paul. *God is faithful, he writes elsewhere, and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.*⁵ If we remain pure, we shall see God. We shall see Him in the work of His creation in this world and we shall see and enjoy Him for ever in Heaven. *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*⁶

3. Most pure Virgin, immaculate Mother of God, you see how many dangers and snares surround my soul. You see how weak I am and how much I need your help. Assist me, I beseech you, when I am tempted. Grant that I may die in the state of grace rather than fall into sin. Amen.

¹ Ps. 18, 1.² Mt. 11, 12.³ Cf. 1 Cor. 6, 15-20.⁴ Phil. 4, 13.⁵ 1 Cor. 10, 13.⁶ Mt. 5, 8.

26th May

PRAYER TO MARY, OUR MOTHER

1. There is a story told of a devout man who was wavering before the onslaught of temptation and was accustomed to kneel before a statue of Our Lady and say this simple prayer: "Show yourself a mother to me." When the same man had fallen into sin and, although full of remorse, had not succeeded in reforming, he went one day to Mary's altar and pitifully repeated his usual prayer. Immediately he heard a gentle voice replying: "Show that you are my son."

If we wish Our Lady to be a mother to us, we must also show her that we are her children. Earthly mothers are delighted to think that their offspring take after them. In the same way Mary wishes to see a reflection of her own sanctity in our

thoughts, desires and actions. All this demands sacrifice, of course. It demands hard work, fervent prayer, and constant watchfulness over ourselves. If we do all that we can and never lose courage, God will not refuse us His help and our good Mother will not fail to intercede for us.

2. Even if we fall often into sin, we should never be discouraged. Although Mary is the Mother of all mankind, she is in a special fashion the merciful Mother of sinners. No matter how sinful a man may be, he will not be lost if he is sincerely devoted to Mary. We must not be deluded into imagining, however, that it is enough to pray to Our Lady in order to be saved, even if we continue to commit sin. St. Brigid tells us in her revelations that Mary is not the Mother of hardened sinners, but only of those sinners who desire to amend their lives and pray to her with this intention.¹ Jesus has told us, moreover, that *not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven.*² The same holds for those who are devoted to Our Lady. It is not sufficient to pray to her, but we must also imitate her and accompany our prayers with the resolution of improving.

Fervent prayer is certain to obtain Mary's intercession on our behalf. St. Alphonsus recommends in particular (a) the Hail Mary repeated three times every morning and every night with the invocation 'Mother most pure, pray for me'; (b) an invocation to Our Lady every time the clock strikes the hour; (c) the daily recitation of the Holy Rosary; (d) a visit to the altar of Our Lady every time we make our daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament; (e) and some acts of mortification on the vigils of principal feasts of Our Lady, followed by a fervent celebration of the feasts themselves. If we show our good dispositions in this manner, Mary will be our true Mother in life and in death.

3. O Mary, be my merciful and kind Mother always, but especially when you see me struggling against temptation and

against the wiles of the devil. Grant that I may never fall and offend God again. I need you so much. Help me and save me. Amen.

¹ Rev., Bk. 4, C. 138.

² Mt. 7, 21.

27th May

MARY, QUEEN OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

I. Towards the close of his life, St. Paul wrote to his well-loved disciple, St. Timothy: *As for me, I am already being poured out in sacrifice, and the time of my deliverance is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will give to me in that day; yet not to me only, but also to those who love his coming.*¹

After all his apostolic labours and difficulties, and after a lifetime of boundless love, St. Paul could confidently say that he would receive the crown which he had earned. When the Blessed Virgin came to the end of her earthly pilgrimage, during which she had lovingly worked and suffered so much for Jesus, she could have expected with even greater certainty to receive the crown of glory which she had merited. She was the noblest and holiest of creatures, because she was the Mother of the eternal Word of God made man. Therefore her reward had to be greater than that of any other creature. She was the Mother of the King of Angels and of Saints, of Heaven and of earth. As such, it was her place to rule over them all. Seated at the right hand of her divine Son, she has glory and power which none other could possess. The Church, therefore, invokes her under the title of Queen of Angels and of Saints, Queen of Apostles, Queen of Virgins, of Confessors and of Martyrs, Queen of Heaven and of earth. When our Holy Father, Pius XII,

solemnly proclaimed her Queenship in the year 1954, he was only giving voice to the general consensus of tradition, of the Liturgy, and of the belief of all the faithful.²

It should be very encouraging to all of us to know that we have so powerful a Queen in Heaven, whose privilege it is to dispense God's graces. She has crushed the poisonous head of Satan. Now she is able and eager to help us, her loyal sons and servants, to resist temptation, to frustrate the schemes of our deadly enemy, and to perfect ourselves in virtue.

2. Mary is a supremely powerful Queen, because she is the Mother of God. She is a most merciful Queen, because she is our Mother and the Mother of sinners. She is a most loving Queen, because hers is a kingdom of love and of goodness. Even as she is the most lovable of creatures, so she is the most loving.

"To the immense love of God for his creatures," writes Cardinal Massimi, "and to His command to rational beings that they should love Him with all their hearts, there has been only one worthy response. That response was yours, O Mary. You loved God with an intensity which surpassed the combined love of all other creatures. God created your heart, which was destined to be the heart of His Mother, after the fashion of His own. Adorned with every perfection, it had an immeasurable capacity for love . . . even as you are supreme in your love for God, O Mary, so you are supreme in your love for us . . . What a cause for gladness this is! God loves us, and you love us, O Mary. Our poor hearts which have a natural longing to be loved and suffer so much when they are disappointed, rejoice in being the object of your love. We thank you, O Mary, for favouring us in spite of your greatness and our unworthiness."³

The realisation of Mary's regal power and of her maternal love for us should lead us to have complete confidence in her. This confidence should inspire us to pray fervently to her, to love her in return, and to form a practical resolution of imitating her.

3. O Queen of Angels and of Saints, my most powerful and most loving Mother, have pity on me, for I am surrounded by such great perils and need so much to advance in virtue. Although I am weak and weary, I desire ardently to imitate the shining example of your holiness. Obtain for me from your divine Son the grace to imitate you as far as I am able on earth, so that one day I may share your happiness in the presence of God for all eternity. Amen.

¹ 2 Tim. 4, 6-8.

² Cf. Encyclical "Ad Coeli Reginam," 11th Oct., 1954.

³ Card. Massimi: *Le Feste di Maria*, p. 82-83.

28th May

THE RECOLLECTION OF MARY

1. It is believed that when the Angel Gabriel visited the Blessed Virgin in order to tell her that she was to be the Mother of God, she was in a quiet corner of her home, absorbed in prayer. She had no love for the noise and confusion of the world, but preferred to be recollected in the company of God. This was to be the pattern of her whole life. In the midst of her domestic duties, on her journey to St. Elizabeth, and on her travels in Galilee and Judea in the wake of her divine Son, her mind and heart were always concentrated on God.

Interior recollection is a wonderful thing. It helps us to hear God's voice more clearly. It keeps us removed from the temptations of the world and assists us in sanctifying every moment of our lives.

"The cell continually dwelt in growth sweet,"¹ says *The Imitation of Christ*, and goes on to ask: "What canst thou see elsewhere that thou dost not see here? Behold the heavens, and the earth, and all the elements; for out of these are all things made."² "As often as I have been amongst men," it exclaims,

"I have returned less a man."³ When we move around chattering with different people, we have lost something of ourselves by the time we return home. Perhaps we have wasted a good deal of time in useless conversation or, worse still, have seen or heard unpleasant or disturbing things. When we go about in the world, we do not often see much that is edifying or instructive and rarely meet people whose conversation does us good. For this reason, even when we cannot remain apart, we should carry in ourselves as Mary did a spirit of interior recollection and communication with God.

2. We cannot all be monks or hermits, however. Most men have to live in the world and look after their daily business. They have to deal with all kinds of people and are subject to the tremendous influences of the modern world. How can they be recollected? It is difficult, but it is possible. Most of the Saints lived in the heart of the world while still maintaining close contact with God. St. Paul the Apostle and St. John Bosco are two examples which come to mind.

St. Paul traversed the greater part of the known world. He preached in the temple of Jerusalem and on the Areopagus of Athens, in the Synagogues, squares, courtrooms, and prisons of countless cities. Through it all his heart remained united with God, so that he could exclaim: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*⁴ *For to me to live is Christ, he said, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh is my lot this means for me fruitful labor, and I do not know which to choose. Indeed I am hard pressed from both sides—desiring to depart and to be with Christ, a lot by far the better; yet to stay on in the flesh is necessary for your sake.*⁵

The superhuman industriousness of St. John Bosco is well known. He never rested, but his extraordinary activity derived entirely from his close and loving union with God. We also should try and preserve an oasis of silence in our hearts while we are making our way through the noisy uproar which prevails around us. We shall draw from this oasis of interior recollection

the power to conquer the temptations of the world and to accomplish all the good work which God wishes us to do.

3. Holy Mary, you who are constantly close to God, obtain for me also this interior spirit of prayer. Then I shall be able to raise my thoughts to God in the midst of worldly confusion and I shall not surrender to the enchantment of worldly pleasures. Under your protection I shall always remain united to God, Who is my only true good. Amen.

¹ Bk. I, C. 20 5.

² Ibid. C. 20, 8.

³ Ibid. C. 20, 2.

⁴ Gal. 2, 20.

⁵ Phil. I, 21-23.

29th May

SOLITUDE

I. A man who has no love for solitude does not love God. It can easily happen that worldly objects dazzle the mind and enchant the heart, so that anyone who is greatly occupied with them does not see or experience God in any way. A man who talks a lot with other men rarely speaks with God. God's voice is heard in silence and in solitude, and we must listen for it if we wish to have any ease of conversation with Him. It is fatal to allow ourselves to be deafened by the noise of the world and never to listen for the voice of God which speaks within us.

Only those who have been called to a higher vocation can live in a cloister, but a little solitude is necessary for everybody from time to time. It may be a course in the Spiritual Exercises, or a monthly day of recollection, or a quarter of an hour spent every day in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. In these moments of detachment from the world and of intimacy with God, we can enjoy conditions far above any which can be found on earth. Such moments can be the beginning of a new life.

The Holy Spirit incites us through the prophet Osee to find these necessary intervals for silence and prayer: *I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart.*¹ Jesus set the standard for us when He spent forty days alone in the desert, fasting and praying. Even though the Apostles were engaged in public missionary activity, He was anxious that they should retire from it for a while in order to refresh themselves spiritually. *Come apart into a desert place, He said, and rest a while.*² St. Bernard wrote that silence and peace far away from the noise of the world helped the soul to meditate on God and on spiritual matters.³ "Solitude is Heaven to me"⁴ said St. Jerome. The Blessed Virgin also took refuge from distraction and loved the solitude of her home in Nazareth, where the Angel first announced to her that she was to be the Mother of God.

2. A little solitude is necessary for everyone, but "it is dangerous to concentrate our attention too much on ourselves if, having discovered our own weakness we do not raise our thoughts towards God to implore His mercy."⁵ It is disastrous if solitude leads to laziness or to futile mental rambling. Solitude should be active and fervent. It should be an ascent towards God. It should help us to form the habit of continual conversation with God so that nothing can break our union with Him. A man who only prays when he is on his knees prays very little. The Gospel says that we ought always to pray. Solitude of the heart enables us to obey this precept. "Of what use is the solitude of the body," asks St. Gregory the Great, "without the solitude of the heart?"⁶

If we wish to have this spiritual solitude which will keep us close to God, our hearts must be detached from worldly affairs. "If a glass vase is filled with earth," writes St. Alphonsus, "the light of the sun cannot penetrate it. Similarly, the divine light cannot penetrate a heart which is preoccupied with the love of pleasure and of honours."⁷

Let us love solitude, then. Let us look for it whenever it is

possible, but above all let us keep our hearts free from earthly attachments and united to God.

3. Mary, my beloved Mother, you found in spiritual solitude a true detachment from created things and a loving intimacy with God. Grant that I may not be led astray by the attractions of this world, but may focus my thoughts and affections on Heaven and on Him Who is the final end of my life and will one day be my everlasting happiness. Amen.

¹ Os. 2, 14.

² Mark 6, 31.

³ Epist. 73.

⁴ Epist. 4 ad Rust.

⁵ P. Cordovani, *Breviario Spir.*, P. 14.

⁶ Lib. XXX Mor., cap. 12.

⁷ *Al Divino Servizio*, III, 2.

30th May

LIVING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The ability to live always in the presence of God is the foundation of the spiritual life. It is an unquestionable fact that we are always in the presence of God. *In Him we live and move and have our being.*¹ But we must be aware of this divine presence. If we really live all the time in the presence of God, we shall be able to avoid sin, practise virtue, and enjoy God's close friendship. How can we offend God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, if we remember that we are being watched by Him? "If we reflect on the presence of God," says St. Thomas, "we shall hardly ever sin."² "If we keep ourselves always in the presence of God," writes St. John Chrysostom, "we shall think no evil, say no evil, and do no evil."³

When we are always aware of God's presence and realise that He is absolute truth, goodness and beauty, we shall be moved to love and imitate Him. *Walk in my presence and be perfect.*⁴ Because God is our only true good, we shall try by every means

in our power to live close to Him and to offer Him all the thoughts, desires and actions of our day. The rare moments of formal prayer will not be enough for us then, but we shall long to be in constant communication with God.

When boiling water is moved away from the fire, it gradually loses its heat. It is the same with us, St. John Chrysostom remarked, when we move away from our awareness of God. We must live in His presence all the time and must check ourselves immediately if we notice that we are slipping away from this ideal.

2. The masters of the spiritual life advise us as to the best way to cultivate an awareness of the presence of God.⁵ This may be done by employing the intellect to form the concept of God's nearness and by using the will to offer to Him ourselves and everything around us with acts of humility, adoration and love. The intellect, enlightened by faith, tells us that God is everywhere. *Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*⁶ We should see Him in all His creatures which reflect His eternal glory. "Learn to love the Creator in the creature," says St. Augustine, "so that you may not become attached to created things and so lose Him by Whom you yourself were created."⁷

When we wish to revive in our minds a sense of the presence of God, we should not picture Him as a distant Being, but as our own God Who condescended to dwell within us. We should then listen to His inspirations and humbly venerate His divine majesty which resides in our souls. *Do you not know*, asks St. Paul, *that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*⁸ God is everywhere, but He dwells in a special manner in our souls. It is difficult for us, however, to live with our minds constantly concentrated on Him. If we were able to do so, this would be an anticipation of the happiness of the Blessed in Heaven. But we should have a habitual intention, which we should renew as often as possible, of living in the presence of God and of offering Him all our desires and actions. Then our

whole life will be a continual prayer of great value in the sight of God.

3. My dear Mother Mary, you who lived in the intimate presence of God, obtain for me also this great grace, so that I may avoid sin, do good, and love God upon earth in the hope of enjoying Him for ever in Heaven. Amen.

¹ Acts 17, 28.

² S. Thom., Opusc., 58, 2.

³ Hom. 8 ad Phil., 2.

⁴ Gen. 17, 1.

⁵ Cf. S. Alphons., Al Divino Servizio, III, 3.

⁶ Jer. 23, 24.

⁷ In Ps. 19.

⁸ I Cor. 3, 16.

31st May

PRAY FOR US . . . AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH

I. We have come to the end of this month, which we have dedicated to Mary. Let us remember, however, that apart from this month of May we should dedicate our whole lives to her up to the final moment of death. We are always in need of Mary's patronage and intercession with God. Let us always have recourse to her, therefore, especially in danger and in suffering, but most especially at the decisive moment of death, for this is the moment on which and eternity depends. This day will arrive sooner or later, but it will certainly come, *at an hour that you do not expect.*¹

In the second part of the Hail Mary the Church places on our lips these words of supplication: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." How many times we have recited this prayer! But do we ever think of death? Let us remember that a meditation on death is the most valuable lesson in life. One day we shall find ourselves face to face with God, drawing our last breath on earth. It may be on a sick bed, it may be in the middle of a street—we do not know. It may be after a long illness at the end of which we are

comforted by the Holy Sacraments and blessed by a priest, or it may be quite unexpected. But it is certain that death will come. Let us aim, therefore, at being always prepared, so that it may not come when we have no good works to offer and when our hearts are full of ourselves and of worldly interests. Like Mary, let us lead lives of holiness, and we shall be sure to die holy deaths. Let us beseech our heavenly Mother to be by our side at that final moment to sustain us in the conflict and to consign our souls to her divine Son, Jesus.

2. Our divine Redeemer, although He was God, did not except Himself from the law of death. It was appropriate, therefore, that His divine Mother should have been no exception either. But Mary had shared in the torments of her Son's death upon Calvary and so obtained from Him the privilege of a death so sweet and gentle as hardly to justify the name at all. Her soul was separated from her body as if in an ecstasy of love and was united even more indissolubly with God. She did not die of a natural disease, but out of love for God. She had always loved God with all the ardour of the noblest of creatures and her life ended in a final outpouring of love. It was the climax of a continuous ascent towards God. Death should be like this for us also. It can be like this if we follow her example, especially in the boundlessness of her love for God.

3. O Mary, my tender Mother, be at my side throughout my life, but especially at the hour of death. Shelter me beneath your maternal mantle and never let me be far apart from you. Grant that I may have a calm and peaceful death like yours, a death made easy by a great love for Jesus and for you, as well as by the reception of the Holy Sacraments and by your special blessing. Amen.

¹ Luke 12, 40.

JUNE

1st June

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

1. All devotions which have been approved by the Church are valuable because they are acts of religion which have as their object the author of all holiness and source of all goodness. By these acts God is adored, thanked and supplicated by His children who have been redeemed by the Precious Blood of Christ. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to the Saints is also directed ultimately towards God, Who has endowed His faithful servants, especially the Mother of Jesus, with His gifts and graces and has established them as mediators by His throne. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, however, is not one of the many pious practices merely permitted or recommended by the Church. Fundamentally, it is a devotion which is essential for any Christian in so far as it is the cult of the love of God made man for our sakes.

We know that Christianity is the religion of love. *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*¹ Everything flows from God's love for mankind—both the Creation and the Redemption, for God created us out of love and redeemed us with the love of His only-begotten Son Who became man and died for us; and both the Old and the New Law, for the basis of the Old Law was *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength,*² and

the commandment of charity was called by Jesus His own commandment, on which His entire teaching was based. The Sacraments, especially the Blessed Eucharist, have their origin in the same infinite love. So have the graces which God gives us, our justification through the merits of our Redeemer, and the final reward for which we hope in Heaven. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is the worship of this infinite love, of which it is a living symbol.

2. When we consider it under its fundamental aspect as the cult of the love of God rather than of the Incarnate Word, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is as old as Christianity, even though it is only in recent centuries that it has assumed its present symbolism. *He who does not love does not know God*, says St. John, *for God is love.*³ *And we have come to know*, he continues, *and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*⁴ This cult of the love of God, particularly of the love of God made man, vibrates throughout the pages of the Gospel and of the writings of the Apostles, especially of St. John and of St. Paul. In the works of the Fathers there are references to the Heart of Jesus, pierced with a lance, from which flowed all the infinite graces of the Church for our redemption. We are reminded of this in the Encyclical published by Pope Pius XII in the year 1956. But the specific cult of the love of God as symbolised by the Heart of Jesus was explicitly approved by the Church after Jesus Himself appeared in the year 1674 to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and showed her His Heart on fire with love for men.

3. We should have a very high regard, therefore, for this devotion to the Sacred Heart. We should excite in our hearts acts of love which will compensate in some way for the infinite love which Jesus has for us. Finally, we should try and make our lives correspond with our love by emulating as far as possible the holy and immaculate life of Jesus Christ.

Ejaculation: May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere known and loved.

¹ 1 John 4, 16.

² Deut. 6, 4.

³ 1 John 4, 8.

⁴ 1 John 4, 16.

2nd June

THE NECESSITY OF DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

1. Considered as the cult of the love of God and of His Incarnate Son, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a necessary and obligatory religious practice. God loved us so much that He willed that the Eternal Word should assume a human nature, instruct us concerning the way to Heaven and give us the means necessary to reach it, and die upon the Cross in order to impart to us the merits of the shedding of His Precious Blood. It is obvious, then, that we have a strict duty to make a return of homage and love for such great love on God's part. *God so loved the world*, the Gospel says, *that He gave His only-begotten Son that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.*¹ *In this has the love of God been shown in our case*, St. John adds in his first epistle, *that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we may live through Him.*²

It is the mystery of the immeasurable love of God that He became man, suffered and died for us. We should offer Him in return not only the affection of our hearts but also our adoration, gratitude, and the dedication of our entire lives in His service. As He lived and died for love of us, so we should live and die for love of Him. As His human-divine actions were aimed at our salvation, so we should aim all our thoughts and actions at the promotion of His glory. In this way, writes Pope Pius XI, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus becomes the synthesis of Christianity and the guide to more perfect knowledge, love, and imitation of Christ.³

2. It is necessary to develop and meditate on these words of Pius XI, from which it is clear that the cult of the Sacred Heart not only contains the synthesis of Christianity, the religion of love, but contains the most effective guide to the knowledge, love and imitation of Jesus Christ. From the first moments of His life, when He was an infant in the cold, damp cave of Bethlehem, to the final moment when He breathed His last upon the Cross, the heart of Jesus was overflowing with love for us. We can learn from this to know our Divine Saviour better, so that appreciating more fully His infinite love for us, we shall feel an upsurge of gratitude and of love. We shall feel determined to live entirely for Him as He lived entirely for us, to obey His commandments with generosity, and to imitate His example with the assistance of His grace. This should be the result of our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially during this month which is consecrated to Him.

3. O my Jesus, You Who are love itself, enkindle in my heart the divine fire which consumed and transformed the Saints.

¹ John 3, 16. ² I John 4, 9.

³ Enc. "Misericordissimus Redemptor," A.A.S., 1928, p. 167.

3rd June

THE LOVE OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL

1. If we meditate on the pages of the Gospel, we shall find that they are vibrant with the infinite love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us in imagination enter the cave of Bethlehem and kneel before the crib where the Divine Infant is lying. Darkness is all around, darkness over the earth, darkness in the minds and hearts of the majority of men. But now the heavens open and

from the brightness the voices of angels ring out. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will." Who is this infant? He is the Eternal Word, the substantial image of God, Who for love of us has been made man. He is the Infinite One Who has willed to unite Himself with the finite in order to lift us towards Himself. This little heart is throbbing like that of any baby, but in this throb is expressed the love of the God-Man. It is a profound mystery that God should have loved man so much that He became a tiny infant. Yet He did this so that we might love Him more easily and in order to show us His own immeasurable love. There is about this Infant a fascination, at once human and divine, which compels us to love Him, even as Mary, Joseph and the simple shepherds loved Him. He is asking us for love, adoration and complete surrender. Can we refuse Him?

Now let us take ourselves in imagination to Calvary and kneel at the foot of the Cross. The heart which began to beat with love in the manger at Bethlehem has given everything for us, has poured forth its precious blood for our salvation, and has bestowed on us as a final gift the Blessed Mother of God. Now this heart is consumed with love for us and ceases to beat only when it has given us everything. *It is consummated.*¹ At Bethlehem we have experienced a joyful ecstasy of love. Here at the foot of the Cross we should experience a deep sorrow which will cause us to weep for our sins and to transform our lives after the model of Jesus Christ.

2. The whole life of our Saviour was motivated by love for us from the moment of birth to the moment of death. Let us recall to mind an incident of particular significance. Jesus was at the gate of Naim when a funeral procession came out from the city. The only son of a poor widow had died. He was all that she had in life. The Heart of Jesus was moved with compassion. He stopped the procession, recalled the young man to life, and restored him to his mother.

Once, when Jesus was preaching in the desert, He was surrounded by a vast multitude which had followed Him there without giving any thought to material necessities. His Heart was touched by the sight of this hungry crowd. *I have compassion on the crowd,*² He said, and performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.

One day Jesus saw a poor woman in tears who was surrounded by a group of men who were planning to stone her. She was an adulteress, and this was the penalty commanded by the law of Moses. But Jesus looked into the soul of the unfortunate woman and saw that she was repentant. He looked into the hearts of the old men who had condemned her and saw that they were full of evil. *Let him who is without sin among you, He said, be the first to cast a stone at her.* At this her accusers went away. Jesus turned to the woman. *Has no one condemned thee?* He asked her. *Neither will I condemn thee. Go thy way and from now on sin no more.*³

Let us recall the touching parables of the prodigal son and the lost sheep. Let us recall all those pages in which the human-divine love of Jesus is forcefully shown and we shall feel eager to return such great love, to weep for our sins and to live entirely for Jesus, as He lived entirely for us.

3. Jesus, I live for you; Jesus, I die for you; Jesus, I am Yours in life and in death.

¹ John 19, 30.

² Mark 8, 2.

³ John 8, 1-11.

4th June

THE SACRED HEART AND THE BLESSED EUCHARIST

1. It is from the loving Heart of Jesus that His innumerable gifts come to us—His graces, the Sacraments, the supernatural work of our redemption. His many acts of mercy and com-

passion, of which we read in the pages of the Gospel, show us the immensity of the love which His Heart bore for us.

The greatest of all His gifts to us is the Eucharist, for in the Eucharist He gives us not merely His gifts, but Himself, the author of all these gifts. There are three great mysteries which show us in a special way the infinite love of God for us and indicate, although in a manner which we cannot clearly comprehend, that He is love itself. *God is love.*¹ These three mysteries are the Creation, the Incarnation and the Eucharist. God, infinitely perfect and happy in Himself, wished to impart something of His infinite perfection. He created the universe and made man master of it. But ungrateful man separated himself from God by sin. He became engulfed in an abyss of evil from which he was incapable of rising to return to God, his only good. Then God, in another mysterious act of love, became man. The Eternal Word assumed a human form, taught us the way to Heaven, gave us the means of reaching it, and died for our sins on the Cross. We could never meditate sufficiently on this profound mystery of love.

There was more to follow, however. When Jesus was returning to His heavenly Father, He wished to remain among us. During His earthly life He had given Himself completely up to the final immolation on Calvary. But He wished to give us Himself for all time until the end of the world. This is the explanation of the Eucharist, which is Jesus dwelling amongst us as our nourishment and as our consolation in life and at the hour of death.

2. By means of this wonderful gift, we can live the life of Jesus Himself.

It is our Lord Himself Who says to us: *As the living Father has sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me.*² In other words, as He draws His divine and human life from the Father and lives by means of Him, to Whom as God He is substantially united and equal, so

anyone who partakes of the Eucharist is united closely to Jesus, lives His life, and is transformed by His supernatural grace. When Holy Communion is received, therefore, as it ought to be and as the Saints received it, it leads to the mysterious union of which St. Paul speaks: *To me to live is Christ.*³ *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*⁴

The effect of Holy Communion on us should be similar to that of a graft upon a tree, whose life is thereby transformed and which begins to produce the fruit of the new shoot instead of that of the old trunk. We should no longer live the life of the old man, but that of the new, which is Jesus. We ought, therefore, to produce His divine fruits. Our actions will have a supernatural value because they are performed in Jesus and through Jesus. We should be very grateful to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for this gift of His infinite goodness. We should approach Holy Communion with humility, love, and complete self-surrender. Our hearts should be fused in the Heart of Jesus and our love should be fused in His infinite love.

3. May the most holy and divine Sacrament be praised and thanked at every moment.

¹ 1 John 4, 8.

² John 6, 58.

³ Phil. 1, 21.

⁴ Gal. 2, 20.

5th June

THE SACRED HEART AND HOLY VIATICUM

1. The infinite love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus accompanies us through life. Our Lord loved us so much that He gave His life for us; there could not possibly be any greater love than this. *Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends.*¹ The Heart of Jesus beats for us continually and His gaze follows us everywhere, especially when we are in danger or in temptation.

Since Jesus loved us so much that He died for us, it is incredible that He would ever abandon us. Even though He is now happy

and beyond suffering in Heaven, He still loves us dearly. But if the Sacred Heart enfolds us now in a close embrace of love, He will certainly protect us in a very special manner at the moment of death, that moment on which depends an eternity of joy or of suffering.

Let us reflect on what happened when Jesus was hanging upon the Cross. He gave us all His love and all His Precious Blood, and with His dying breath He gave us the last treasure He possessed, His Blessed Mother. Omnipotent though He was, He could not give us anything more. He had exhausted His infinite love, giving us not merely all that He possessed, but giving us Himself also.

One of the thieves who was being crucified along with Him turned towards Him a look of repentance and of supplication. His Heart was filled with love and mercy and He said to the penitent thief: *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*² These are comforting words. Some day we also shall be in agony and shall turn to Jesus in our final hour. Then Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist will come to us for the last time. Let us pray earnestly that Viaticum may bring us the same consolation which the words of Jesus gave to the good thief: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise!"

2. We should particularly ask the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the grace to die a good death, strengthened by Holy Viaticum. Let us picture ourselves in this final hour. The world is fading away and nothing remains of the honours, successes, and pleasures of our past life. There will remain only two things—on one side, the merits which we have obtained by our prayers, penances and good works; on the other side, the sum total of our sins and ingratitude to God. May Jesus come at this moment into our poor hearts, trembling for our sins and lacking in virtue. May Holy Viaticum come to strengthen us. May the white Host bear with it forgiveness, hope, and the purifying flame of love.

Then the infinite love of the Heart of Jesus will be mingled with the weak limited love of our hearts. It will waft us into a state of everlasting happiness, where to love is to possess the boundless joy of God.

3. From a sudden and unprovided death, O Lord, deliver us. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me now and in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you. Amen.

¹ John 15, 13.

² Luke 23, 43.

6th June

THE WORSHIP OF THE SACRED HEART IN RELATION TO THE LOVE OF GOD AND OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

1. There is nothing sentimental about having devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Neither does this devotion consist only in prayers and pious practices. It is much deeper than this. It should flood our whole being, enkindle the fire of divine love in our hearts, and transform our lives in accordance with the commands of Jesus. A love which is not active cannot be genuine; it is only a passing emotion.

Our love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus should be real and effective. As far as possible it should change us into living replicas of Jesus Christ.

*You are my friends, He said, if you do the things I command you.*¹ Which commands does He mean? All of them, of course. *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*² *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*³ *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul.*⁴

Anyone who practises these precepts and all others which are

contained in the Gospel is sincerely devoted to the Sacred Heart. If anyone neglects to put them into practice, but is satisfied with prayers, ejaculations and the performance of spiritual exercises, his devotion is empty and has no foundation.

These prayers, ejaculations and pious practices have their value in so far as they can attract God's grace. But we must co-operate with God's grace by our good actions. Then our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus will be sincere and effective.

2. The cult of the Sacred Heart demands especially the practice of the two great fundamental precepts of Christianity, namely, that we should love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. The implementation of this teaching can transform our lives.

Do we love God above all things and more than we love ourselves? What is the predominant concept in our minds? Is it the concept of God? What is the first love in our hearts? Is it the love of God? What is our main desire in life? Is it the glory of God? Or is it our own glory or our own pleasure?

We have still a long way to go in the way of the love of God, which is the way of perfection. We can only really be said to be ourselves, moreover, when we love God above all things and more than ourselves. If a man does not love God above all things, neither does he love himself in the way in which he ought to love himself, because God is our only true happiness.

Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? How much moral and physical wretchedness do we see around us? But do we try and remedy it by every means in our power, no matter what the sacrifice? Or are we cold and disinterested? Let us remember the words of St. John, the apostle of charity. *In this we have come to know his love, that he laid down his life for us; and we likewise ought to lay down our life for the brethren.*⁵ Are we prepared to do this? Are we at least prepared to give away whatever we do not need ourselves in order to relieve poverty and want?

3. Anyone who is lacking in an effective love for God and for

his neighbour has no real devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Ejaculation: My Jesus, mercy!

¹ John 15, 14.

² Mt. 11, 29.

³ Mt. 16, 24.

⁴ Mt. 22, 37.

⁵ I John 3, 16.

7th June

THE PROMISES MADE TO THOSE WHO PRACTISE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

1. When Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and commanded her to propagate the worship of His Sacred Heart, He promised very special blessings to those who would be truly devoted to His Sacred Heart and spread this devotion among others. "I will give them all the graces necessary for their state in life . . . consolation in all their troubles . . . peace in their families . . . blessings on all their undertakings."

These promises are an inducement to us to love Jesus and to spread devotion to His Sacred Heart.

Our Divine Saviour is not content with having loved us so much during His mortal life and given us His Precious Blood, the Blessed Eucharist, and His most holy Mother for our salvation. He sees that His infinite love is not returned as it ought to be and seems to exercise a gentle pressure in order to compel us to love Him. "Behold this Heart which has so loved men that It spared nothing . . . to prove to them Its love. And in return I receive from the greater part of men nothing but ingratitude, by the contempt, irreverence, sacrileges and coldness with which they treat Me in this Sacrament of Love."

"I thirst, I burn with a consuming desire for men's love, and I find none to quench this thirst, according to My wish, by making any return of love."

Who could fail to feel the force of this appeal?

2. The promises made by Jesus to those who are truly devoted to His Sacred Heart are a new proof of His infinite love and mercy. However, if anyone were to cultivate devotion to the Sacred Heart merely to gain His benefits, and to think more of his own spiritual and temporal advantage than of Jesus, he would display a niggardly spirit quite unworthy of Our Lord's favour. The worship of the Sacred Heart could degenerate into a kind of utilitarian egoism undeserving of the name of devotion. Pious practices could become cold and formal, and degenerate into sentimentality tinged with superstition. There is nothing to prevent us asking the Sacred Heart for graces and favours which we need. In fact we should do so, for it is He Who has made these promises to us and is eager to fulfil them because He loves us. But we should be generous with Jesus in return for His infinite generosity towards us. We should love Him because He is so worthy of our love. Our love should be expressed not only in prayers and outward forms but in a deep personal transformation which will make us more like Jesus. True love transforms and unites two hearts. Let us love Jesus and we shall live with Jesus, through Jesus, and in Jesus. His love will effect in us the miracle which it produced in St. Paul. *To me to live is Christ.*¹

3. Sweet Heart of Jesus, make me love You more and more.

¹ 1 Phil. I, 21.

8th June

OUR RESPONSE TO THE LOVE OF THE
SACRED HEART

1. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is adorable in itself not only as the living symbol of His human-divine love, but also as part of

His most holy humanity, in so far as it is hypostatically united to the divinity of the Word.

We should, therefore, pay very special homage to the Sacred Heart. It is the Heart of the God-Man and as such is worthy of our highest adoration. Its sentiments harmonised mysteriously with the human will and at the same time with the divine Will of the incarnate Word of God. Every throb was a token of an infinite love which we could never fully understand, for we cannot properly *know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge*.¹ But we should adore this love as represented by the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This adoration is not an act of idolatry. On the contrary, it is a fitting act of worship, because its object is the Heart of the God-Man and of the human-divine love of which it is the symbol. Moreover, we owe the Sacred Heart of Jesus all our gratitude and a return of love.

Let us reflect on how much Jesus has done for us and how much He has loved us. Let us consider not only the general work of Redemption and the supernatural gifts and graces connected with it, but also the particular favours which we have received from our childhood up to the present moment. He has bound us to His Heart by a loving chain of graces and of mercies. How could we dare to break this chain or to ignore such love? Love demands love in return. Favours demand gratitude. It would be disastrous for us to display indifference and coldness or, worse still, to respond to such great love by committing new offences.

2. We owe an enormous debt of satisfaction and expiation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the many sins with which we have repaid His graces. Let us picture the divine Redeemer kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane, while His divine vision pierces the centuries and sees the sins and atrocities of men. He sees the offences of each one of us. He groans and perspires blood, then He offers Himself as an innocent victim for us all.

This was an act of infinite love which cost the life of the God-Man.

What must our reaction be? Shall we continue to sin and remain cold and unaffected? The passion of Jesus demands our participation in His sufferings, not only in reparation for our own sins, but also in expiation of the sins of others. Let us look around us and see how many men are so indifferent and wicked, as if Jesus had never come to save us, had never shed His blood for us, and had never loved us with an infinite love. At this spectacle the Saints inflicted penances on themselves in order to offer to Jesus a return of love and reparation for sin.

3. What are we doing? If we really love the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we should offer penances and sacrifices in order to make reparation for our sins and the sins of others and to propitiate this adorable Heart, Which ardently desires to bestow new favours upon us.

Ejaculation: All for You, O Sacred Heart of Jesus.

¹ Eph. 3, 19.

9th June

THE CROWN OF THORNS WHICH SURROUNDS THE SACRED HEART

1. When Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary, He showed her His Heart encircled by a crown of sharp thorns. What was the significance of this? In Heaven Jesus is happy and cannot suffer any more. The Angels, Saints and the whole of creation sing a hymn of unceasing praise in His honour. Nevertheless, He sees the immense tide of sin which surges forth from the human race which He redeemed by His Precious Blood, a redemption now made futile by many. He is aware of the insane blasphemies hurled by so many against His lofty throne. He

sees how His gifts, His Sacraments and His graces are abused by many. He sees, finally, the number of privileged souls, often consecrated to His service, who are indifferent and ungrateful while they should be trying to make reparation for the evils of mankind by their love, prayers and penances. The explanation for this mystical crown of thorns lies in His infinite love. He does not suffer any more, because He cannot suffer, but He still has an immense love for all men, even for sinners and for those who are lukewarm and ungrateful. He loves and wishes to save all men. In spite of their sinfulness and ingratitude, He still calls them appealingly to His Heart, which they by their sins have crowned with thorns and pierced with a lance.

This is a mystery of love which we cannot properly understand. Only a man who loves Jesus fervently can have even the slightest understanding of it. If we sincerely love the divine Heart of Jesus, we shall realise that these sharp thorns which once pierced His Heart in Gethsemane and on Calvary were caused by our sins. Then we shall do our best to make a generous return for such love and to make reparation, even with grave sacrifice, for the offences which are still being committed by men against the loving Heart of the Redeemer.

2. There are many ways of showing our love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of making reparation for our sins and for the sins of mankind. We can console ourselves with the reflection that by these acts of love and reparation we are removing the thorns which encircle the Heart of Jesus. The simplest ways of doing this are by prayers, ejaculations, and expressions of love directed towards the adorable Heart of our Redeemer; and by visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In silence and recollection before the Tabernacle we shall feel the Heart of Jesus beating with love and shall offer in return for His infinite love the affection of our poor hearts.

We can also receive Holy Communion in reparation. When Jesus is in us and we are in Jesus, it will be easier and more

pleasant to offer Him our love and expiation. We can make reparation also by practising the devotion of the First Fridays of the month. This pious practice, so pleasing to the Heart of Jesus, aims at being a mass offering of love and reparation for the sins of the entire human race.

3. We can also make reparation by voluntary penances or at least by offering up our daily sufferings in a spirit of loving generosity. But the course most pleasing of all to the Sacred Heart is the continual imitation of His outstanding virtues in such a way as to become living reproductions of our adorable Redeemer.

Ejaculation: Sacred Heart of Jesus, convert poor sinners.

10th June

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS SURMOUNTED BY A FLAMING CROSS

1. St. Margaret Mary saw the Sacred Heart of Jesus surmounted by flames in the midst of which a Cross was raised on high. These flames and this Cross were the symbol of the infinite love of Jesus. Let us reflect a little. God, immeasurably happy in Himself, wished to communicate a share in His happiness to men, whom He created in a state of earthly happiness. He was offended by men and, when He saw that they were heading for destruction, He sent His Eternal Word to them. The Word took a human nature and became our brother; He preached the way to Heaven and gave us the means to achieve it. More than this, He offered Himself as a divine victim of expiation for our sins. Having been condemned by those to whom He had come to show the way, He died upon the Cross and shed all His blood for our salvation.

Pagans of all times have called this "the folly of the cross."

In fact, it is the miracle of the infinite love of God for humanity. Let us remember, however, that, although His love and goodness are infinite, so also is His justice. It is an overwhelming miracle of love on the part of God that He became man and died for us. It will be our own downfall if we fail to co-operate with this miracle of love.

The same Jesus Who died on the Cross for us and revealed His Heart, pierced and flaming with love, will one day appear with the same glorious sign of the Cross as our Supreme Judge. Then He will say to the wicked: "Depart from me, accursed ones, into everlasting fire!"

God's justice is as infinite as His charity. We must choose either the way of the Cross, the way of love and goodness to which the Sacred Heart of Jesus invites us, or the way of sin, which leads to the gulf of ruin and the final condemnation of the Supreme Judge. This is the tremendous choice we have to make.

2. This flaming Heart surmounted by a Cross represents not only the infinite love of Jesus, the obedient victim of love, but indicates also that if we wish to follow our divine Redeemer as far as Heaven, our true country, we must follow Him along the path of love and of the Cross. There is only one way of perfection, and that is the way of the Cross.

Jesus has told us this and has set us an example. *If anyone wishes to come after me, He said, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*¹ He gave us an example by allowing Himself, innocent though He was, to be burdened with our sins. He staggered as far as Calvary beneath the weight of the Cross and there He shed His Precious Blood to the last drop. We must take the road of the Cross also. If we do not love our own cross, we do not love the Cross of Jesus. The Saints looked for humiliation and suffering in order to prove their love for Jesus. We must at least accept with resignation those sufferings and humiliations which Providence has allotted to us. We must

embrace our cross daily and carry it with faith and love in the footsteps of Jesus. The Cross is the standard of Christ; it is the ladder which leads to Heaven. If anyone does not want to have anything to do with it, he does not want to have anything to do with Jesus.

3. Sweetest Jesus, be not my Judge, but my Saviour.

¹ Luke 9, 23.

I Ith June

“LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM MEEK AND
HUMBLE OF HEART”

I. Jesus is perfection itself. In Him, therefore, every virtue is to be found. He could truly claim that He fulfilled in Himself the precept: *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹ Throughout His life He performed in a perfect manner the will of His heavenly Father. *I do always the things that are pleasing to him.*²

Jesus Christ provided us with an example of every virtue. As the foundation of all the virtues, He insisted on the great precept of loving God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. In proposing Himself as a model, however, this is what He said: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.*³ The outstanding example which Jesus gave us for our imitation was this meekness and humility of heart. We shall have peace of soul only if we are meek and humble.

In what did the humility of Jesus consist? He was God, and He became man. He Who possessed everything was born poor in a wretched stable and lived as a lowly workman for thirty years. He allowed Himself to be betrayed by one of His Apostles, to be sentenced to death as an evildoer, and finally to be executed on the Cross.

He combined humility with gentleness. He was happy when

He could receive back penitent sinners and grant them forgiveness and peace. Let us recall the examples of Mary Magdalen, the adulteress, the lost sheep, the prodigal son, and finally the repentant thief to whom He promised the reward of Heaven. What greater gentleness and mercy could we ever find?

To the present day, moreover, Jesus Christ is hidden in the Blessed Eucharist under the consecrated species and appeals to us to imitate and love Him.

When we are disturbed by pride, ambition, or worldly desires, let us go to Jesus and kneel in silence before the Tabernacle. "Learn from me," He will say to us once more, "for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls."

2. It is very easy to be gentle and humble when everything is going well for us. It is difficult, however, when we meet humiliation, misunderstanding, or opposition. We need to be well advanced in perfection if we are to have mildness and humility of heart like that of Jesus.

We can only reach this state of perfection by prayer, sacrifice and character formation. Pride, self-love, and the desire to excel are the evil effects of our corrupted nature. St. Francis de Sales jestingly remarked that self-love dies three days after us. It is difficult to remove it completely from our character and to put in its place the love of God and of our neighbour, but this operation is necessary if we are to obtain Christ-like humility and gentleness of heart. God, not our own ego, should be the centre of our lives; He should be the focal point of all our thinking. Let us beseech God for this grace and try and behave in this fashion on all occasions.

When we encounter lack of sympathy, coldness or injustice on the part of our fellowmen, we should try and avoid becoming annoyed or discouraged. The testimony of a sound conscience before God is all that should concern us. We should offer everything else to God, whether it is joy or sorrow, praise or criticism. We shall be rewarded with peace of soul.

3. Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.

¹ Mt. 5, 48.

² John 8, 29.

³ Mt. 11, 29.

12th June

“UNLESS YOU TURN AND BECOME LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”

1. At the beginning of their ministry, before they had been strengthened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were as ambitious as most other men. One day the mother of John and James, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and asked Him if her two sons could have precedence over the other Apostles and sit on the highest thrones in His kingdom, one at His right hand and the other at His left. Jesus disapproved of this desire to predominate. *Whoever wishes to become great among you, He said, 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.*¹

On another occasion the Apostles came to Jesus and asked Him which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' only answer was to call a little child and to place him in the centre of the group. *Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever, therefore, humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*²

This is the lofty teaching of the Gospel. If we wish to be great and pleasing in the eyes of God, we must be unimportant in our own regard and in our relations with men. The Gospel involves an overthrow of human values. Anyone who makes himself insignificant will become great. Anyone who tries to

make himself out to be a great man becomes of little account in the eyes of God. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*³ If we wish to please the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the first thing we must do is become as little children. In other words, we shall have to suppress our ambition and vanity, and destroy our self-love so that the Sacred Heart may fill our hearts with the love of God.

2. Unfortunately, very few people give any consideration to the Gospel words which we have just quoted. Nevertheless, these words are in the form of a command and carry a formidable sanction. "Unless you turn and become like little children," Jesus says, "you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Those who are proud, ambitious, and intoxicated by the acclaim of men and by the importance of their positions will be unable to pass through the narrow gateway of Heaven. They are attached to the world and they will have the world, but they will never have Heaven. We must make our choice between this world and Heaven.

In order to become like little children, we must be humble in the presence of God and men and we must acquire the simplicity and innocence of the young.

Innocence implies freedom from guilt and the possession of a childlike straightforwardness of attitude. Have you ever noticed the eyes of a child? They seem to reflect something of Heaven. Little children are angels upon the earth; this is what we must become. The simplicity of children leads them to entrust themselves completely to their parents. In the same way we must entrust ourselves completely to God and to His divine Providence in all the circumstances of our lives.

This is the spiritual childhood at which we must aim and which the Saints achieved, especially St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, St. Philip Neri, and St. Francis of Assisi. Let us ask the Sacred Heart of Jesus for this wonderful gift.

3. O Jesus, friend of little children, bless all little children throughout the world.

¹ Mt. 20, 26-28.

² Mt. 18, 3-4.

³ Cf. James 4, 6; 1 Peter 5, 5.

13th June

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA

1. St. Anthony of Padua was not born a saint, but He became one as the result of prayer, self-denial and penance, which attracted to him God's many graces.

On a summer evening in the year 1219 five mendicant friars arrived at the gate of the ancient Abbey of Coimbra, asking for hospitality from the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. They received a whole-hearted welcome. When they had refreshed themselves, they revealed that they belonged to the new Religious Family founded by St. Francis of Assisi. They said that they hoped to reach Morocco in order to convert the Saracens and, if it was God's pleasure, to receive the palm of martyrdom. Amongst the Canons Regular who were listening to them was the youthful Anthony, who had already consecrated his life to God.

Not long afterwards this little band of Franciscan missionaries was cut down by the scimitars of the infidels and became a glorious band of martyrs. Their bodies were brought back in triumph to the Abbey which they had visited and there they were buried with great honour. When they were going away, Anthony had listened enthusiastically to all that they had said and had felt a noble envy. Now that he was in the presence of their hallowed remains, he experienced an urge to follow in their footsteps.

So Anthony joined the Franciscan Order and joyfully set off for the coast of Morocco in search of missionary labour and of martyrdom. But when he landed on African soil he was struck

down by a serious attack of malaria which compelled him to return to his native land.

There is no foreseeing the designs of Divine Providence. The boat in which Anthony was travelling was battered by a tempest and had to go ashore in Italy. Henceforward Italy was Anthony's second fatherland. It was here that he conducted his remarkable and fruitful apostolate and slowly accomplished his martyrdom by the daily struggle for perfection.

This is a headline for us. We may not have been called to go and spread the faith amongst the infidels at the risk of martyrdom. But we have all been called to a state of holiness. Perfection, moreover, is a gradual martyrdom. The heroic daily effort which is required to abstain from sin and to overcome the wayward tendencies of our nature can fairly be said to be no less difficult than a bloody martyrdom. This is the kind of martyrdom which we must all endure. St. Anthony of Padua will obtain for us the grace to undergo it with the same generosity and constancy which he displayed.

2. On the 13th June in the year 1231 a crowd of children set out from the nearby convent of Arcella and entered Padua crying out: "The Saint is dead!" The entire city was plunged into mourning because its Saint was dead. Anthony had traversed Italy, converting heretics, recalling innumerable sinners to repentance, working miracles, giving peace to souls and to strife-torn cities. Soon he had felt that his young life was already running out as the result of labours and austerity, and he had determined to hide himself in a little Franciscan monastery at Camposampiero near Padua. In order to shelter himself from the world as far as possible, he built a little cell in the bifurcation of the branches of a giant walnut tree. Here he spent his last days in prayer and contemplation, joining with the birds in the songs of praise to God. He was no longer a man, but an angel in human form. Crowds of the faithful flocked round this tree to hear once again the voice of the Saint calling on them to

practise virtue and to follow the road to Heaven. It was in this little nest, at thirty-six years of age, that his life slowly flickered out, consumed not so much by disease as by a burning love for God and for his fellowman.

Let us pray that we may obtain a spark of this love which will detach us from the world, cause us to belong entirely to God, and make us generous apostles in our work for the salvation of souls.

3. Jesus, my God, I love You above all things.

14th June

THE DIVINE WORKER

1. Let us open the Gospel of St. John. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made.*¹ The work of creation is attributed in a special way to the Eternal Word, the Son of God. He was the divine Worker Who created from nothing the sky, earth, and the marvels which they contain.

Then the Eternal Word of God became man.² But what position did He choose to occupy amongst us? He could have been born heir to the illustrious throne of Rome, the most powerful in all history. He could have been born at Athens amongst the philosophers of the Areopagus, who handed down through the centuries the light of human wisdom and beauty. But it was not likely that the Word of God should have abandoned, so to speak, the eternal glory of the Father in order to wear the mantle of petty human power. He had no need of this. He came amongst us to instruct us in the humility of the path to Heaven, not in the way of human greatness. He was born, therefore, as the son of an artisan, "*the carpenter's son,*"³ and an artisan himself, "*the carpenter, the son of Mary.*"⁴

According to the most ancient and most reliable tradition He was one of the many carpenters in the Palestinian countryside who were prepared to adapt themselves to whatever job arose, whether it was the making of a door, a handle for a hoe, or a plough.⁵ From His youth, therefore, Jesus was a carpenter's apprentice, and when St. Joseph died He carried on his trade and earned a livelihood for His Mother Mary and Himself.

It was only after many years of manual labour that Jesus ceased to be an artisan and dedicated Himself to work of the mind and heart. In the three years of His public life He was an Apostle of truth and goodness. In this way He sanctified every type of work, manual, intellectual and spiritual.

The great lesson which Jesus wished to teach us is that every kind of work is good and noble. The manual labour of the farm-hand and of the artisan is a co-operation in the work of God's creation. Spiritual labour is a co-operation in the work of the Redemption. Both were made holy by Jesus. Let those who work with their hands take inspiration from Jesus, Who subjected Himself for thirty years to all the sacrifices involved in manual labour. Let intellectuals and apostolic workers look to Jesus also, for when His Hour had come He sacrificed Himself in His apostolate and gave His life for us. In His regard the peasant's hoe and the writer's pen, the workman's hammer and the priest's stole, are all noble and holy. The only condition is that all should perform their duties conscientiously from the motive of the love of God and of their neighbour.

2. Work is both a right and an obligation which belongs to all men. In the beginning of creation, however, work was a pleasure for the human race and the earth yielded its fruits easily and readily. *The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it.*⁶ But, after Adam's sin of rebellion, nature in its turn rebelled against man. Work was no longer merely a pleasure, but a chastisement and a dire necessity as well.

*Cursed be the ground because of you, God said to Adam. In toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread . . .*⁷

This commandment of God is binding upon everybody. Idleness is condemned as the source of evil. *Idleness is an apt teacher of mischief.*⁸ Everyone must engage in either mental or manual labour. These two kinds of work complement one another and are equally dignified and necessary. A man who works with his hands should not envy the man who works with his intellect. The mental worker should not despise nor consider himself superior to the manual labourer. We are all brothers and have been placed wherever we are by the designs of Providence. For this reason we should love and help one another.

3. We should accept our daily work and sanctify it with prayer as Jesus did. "To pray and to work" was the ancient motto of the Benedictines.

All work which is done with and for God becomes, as it were, a sacrament which purifies and sanctifies us. When we offer the sweat of our brow to God it becomes like holy water which washes away our faults, while our weariness is converted into prayer.

Ejaculation: Jesus, Divine Worker, bless me, help me, and make me holy.

¹ John 1, 1-3.

² John 1, 14.

³ Mt. 13, 55.

⁴ Mark 6, 3.

⁵ Cf. Justin, Dial. Triph., 88, 8.

⁶ Gen. 2, 15.

⁷ Gen. 3, 17-19

⁸ Eccus. 33, 29.

15th June

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST¹

1. What kind of men were the Apostles before the miracle of Pentecost? They were rough men of the people, generous and fond of Jesus, perhaps, but ignorant, timid, and ambitious.

They were hoping for personal glory in an earthly kingdom. Then came the catastrophe of Calvary. Their simple trust disappeared and left their hearts filled with regret. *Then all the disciples left Him and fled.*² It seemed to them that Jesus had failed, so they deserted Him.

The miracle of the Resurrection restored their faith. But they were still lacking in courage and enterprise.

They gathered together in the Cenacle to pray and shut themselves up there for fear of the Jews. But before He had ascended into Heaven, Jesus had promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to enlighten them concerning His teaching and to give them the courage and ability to spread it throughout the world. Now this promise was fulfilled. On the feast of Pentecost, which was fifty days after that of the Passover, there was a sudden sound from Heaven *as of a violent wind blowing*. Then there appeared *tongues as of fire, which settled upon each of them.*³

From the moment when they received the Holy Spirit the Apostles were utterly transformed. Their intellects were filled with a supernatural light, their hearts were overflowing with love, and their wills received the divine strength to withstand human opposition. They left the Cenacle and began to preach openly the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Their words sounded in the ears of each listener as if they were spoken in his own language, so that the light of the Gospel was given to all. Nor did the men show the slightest fear when they had to face the anger of the Synagogue and of the Jewish people. Like peaceful conquerors, without any human weapons but backed by the power of God, they divided the world amongst them so that they might win it for Christ.

The Roman Empire was small to them. They travelled, moreover, to the distant shores of Ethiopia and India where the Eagle of Rome had never found its way.

Surely this is the most extraordinary miracle of history?

The Holy Spirit accomplished that which human armies had never been able to do save in part or for a limited period of time. In this achievement He used the weakest possible human means, namely, twelve poor fishermen.

The earthly Empire of Rome passed away, but the Spiritual domain of Christ still remains, with its centre at Rome, as the only true light, the only unfailing hope, and the only pledge of salvation for individuals and nations.

2. We are still in need of the Holy Spirit to-day to enlighten and strengthen us. We are essentially so imperfect and so weak. Around us there is a corrupt society, perhaps more depraved and more perilous than that which confronted the Apostles.

A veneer of refinement and civilisation endows modern society with a deceptive lustre, but at its heart there is misery and rottenness much greater than any which our fathers ever knew. This is because in our times progress has become for many an instrument of sin. To-day we have to contend with not merely the existence of evil, but with its industrialisation. Evil is bought and sold; it is propagated for profit.

We need the spirit of God to disperse the forces of corruption, to transform us as He transformed the Apostles, and to help us to make others good.

3. Let us pray fervently to the Holy Ghost. Let us pray with the Church: "Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth."

Let us recollect ourselves in prayer before the Spirit of God on this day of Pentecost. Let us renew our resolutions and entrust them to Him so that He may help us to carry them out.

Ejaculation: Come, into our hearts, O Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth.

¹ This meditation may best be made on the feast of Pentecost.

² Mt. 26, 56. ³ Acts 2, 1.

16th June

WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT REQUIRES OF US

1. What does the Holy Spirit desire of us? He wishes to transform us and to make us holy, and for this He wants our co-operation. We should give our co-operation generously in the manner of the first Christians. These were in close contact with the college of Apostles and tried hard to put their teaching into practice.

In the early days of Christianity every house was like a Church. This should still be the case to-day. We should be bound together spiritually under the influence of the Holy Ghost and under the guidance of the teaching authority of the Church. We should practise the Church's teaching and try to diffuse it among others.

The early Christians also persevered in prayer, and in daily participation in the Sacrament of the Altar. There can be no spiritual life without prayer, because it comes from God. The Holy Spirit speaks to those who humbly and earnestly invoke Him. Our best prayers are those which we say when we receive Holy Communion, however. Then we have Jesus Himself within us with all His graces.

If we receive Holy Communion with the proper dispositions, we can acquire the spirit of charity towards God and our neighbour which is the sum total of Christianity. We can make ourselves holy and can ask for the ability to co-operate in the sanctification of others.

A further characteristic of the early Christians was that they possessed everything in common. We are accustomed to call this attitude of common ownership an evangelical counsel rather than a command. It is the spontaneous outcome of that true and efficacious charity which flows from the Holy Spirit and makes all men brothers.

There is no strict obligation on us to give away everything which we possess for the benefit of our neighbour. But we have

a real obligation to help our neighbour as far as lies in our power when we see that he is in need. Otherwise we cannot say that we love our neighbour as ourselves and therefore cannot claim to be genuine Christians. *He who does not love abides in death,*¹ wrote St. John. *He who has the goods of this world, he continues, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him? My dear children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.*²

It is worth our while to reflect on these tremendous words and to act according to their sense. In modern society there is excessive luxury on one side and excessive poverty on the other. Christianity in its truest sense, therefore, is not being practised. How do we behave in this matter?

2. The Holy Spirit, coming into our souls, asks us to do four things in particular.

(1) To keep far from us everything which could be displeasing to God.

This means that we must avoid sin, which is hateful to God and brings about the death of the soul. When the sin is grave, it destroys charity in us; when it is venial sin, it diminishes our fervour and capacity for good action. We have become the temples of the Holy Spirit. Let us do our best, therefore, to keep ourselves pure and free from every stain of sin. *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*³

(2) To avoid contamination by the spirit of the world, which is repugnant to the Spirit of God. The world is selfish, and we should be on fire with love for God and for our neighbour. The world is vain and proud, and we should love obscurity, recollection and humility. The world looks for happiness in honour, wealth and pleasure, in the passing goods of this life. We, on the other hand, should seek our happiness in eternal and heavenly values, because God alone can satisfy our hearts and make us happy.

(3) To avoid affections which are too human and sensual. Only the clean of heart can see and enjoy God. All the objects and all the people of this world should form for us a ladder which leads to God.

(4) To seek the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit in recollection and in prayer.

We should listen for His voice within us, inspiring and advising us. We should do obediently whatever He desires, no matter what sacrifice this may entail.

3. O Holy Spirit, sweet guest of my soul, remain with me, and grant that I may always remain with You.

¹ 1 John 3, 14.

² 1 John 3, 17-18.

³ Eph. 4, 30.

17th June

THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI¹

1. St. Thomas refers to the Blessed Eucharist as the greatest of all Jesus Christ's miracles.

All the other miracles were accomplished in an instant or, at the most, protracted over a few years, like the raising to life of Lazarus, or the widow's son at Naim. The Eucharist, on the contrary, is a miracle which continues throughout the centuries and all over the world.

The other miracles, moreover, gave us a part of the power and goodness of Jesus. But the Eucharist gives us Jesus Himself with all His graces and gifts. It was not enough for Our Lord to offer Himself on Calvary as a propitiary host for our sins. It was not enough for Him to shed His precious Blood for our redemption. It was not enough to give us the Church to instruct us and to guide us on the way to Heaven.

He wished to give us Himself in addition. He wished to remain

with us as our companion on our mortal pilgrimage and as the spiritual nourishment of our souls.

The power of Jesus is as infinite as His charity. Nevertheless, in the Eucharist this power and charity are, as it were, exhausted. Only the immense love of God could conceive such a miracle.

When we consider this mysterious gift which Jesus has given to each of us, we cannot say that it is too difficult for us to conquer the perverse inclinations of our corrupted nature and that we lack the strength to continue on the way of perfection. Everything is possible with Jesus. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*²

Let us go to Jesus and take our nourishment from Him. Then, like St. Paul, we shall be able to do everything in Him Who is our strength and our support. In union with Jesus we shall be able to conquer sin and to become holy.

2. Human words cannot express the beauty and depth of the passage from the Gospel which to-day's liturgy of the Holy Mass offers for our meditation. It is the passage in which Jesus promises the institution of the Blessed Eucharist.

*My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread that has come down from heaven; not as your fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever.*³

No human being could have visualised or uttered such words. Only the God-Man could have spoken them.

Even outside the Eucharist God communicates with us, descending with His grace into our souls. We feel that He is present; we experience His supernatural influence and inspiration, His appeals to us to do good. But in the Eucharist we have far more than this. We have the God-Man as the food of our souls, through which we live His own life, so that like St. Paul it is no longer we who live, but Christ Who lives in us.

This intimate and mysterious union has been compared with the unfathomable union in which the Son of God lives the life of His heavenly Father, because by means of the Eucharist we should live the supernatural life of Jesus. As a result of this transformation there can be no further place in us for sin, nor for disordered affections and desires, but only for virtue and for God.

3. This is the Feast of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist. Let us enkindle in ourselves a more intense faith and love; let us adore and love Him on behalf of those who neglect to do so. Let us resolve to live an Eucharistic life.

Ejaculation: I adore You at every moment, O living Bread from Heaven, O most wonderful Sacrament.

¹ This meditation is intended for the Feast of Corpus Christi.

² Phil. 4, 13.

³ John 6, 56-59.

18th June

HOLY COMMUNION

1. Let us meditate on what an extraordinary thing Holy Communion is. Jesus, God made man, really descends into us, poor creatures though we are. We become the living temples of the Holy Trinity.

Not alone does Jesus come to us, body, soul and divinity, but He also becomes our food. There is a great difference, however, between the nourishment of material food and the spiritual nourishment which we receive from the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. When we take ordinary natural food, we assimilate it. In other words, we cause it to become blood of our blood and flesh of our flesh. When we receive Holy Communion, on the other hand, it is we who must be assimilated and changed into Jesus. Each of us should become, therefore,

another Jesus, in the manner indicated by St. Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*¹

Material food becomes human and is assimilated into our being. Our Eucharistic food assimilates us into Itself and, in a certain sense, deifies us. This is why St. John Chrysostom calls it a mystery which transports us into Heaven.

Before this can happen, however, it is necessary for us to approach Holy Communion with the necessary dispositions. These are: (1) A lively and active faith, which will enable us to recognise in the white Host the person of Jesus Himself, full of goodness, mercy and love, eager to shower upon us all the treasures of His Heart. (2) Purity and freedom not only from mortal sin, but also from any deliberate attachment to venial sin. (3) Deep humility, because Jesus loves the humble and holds the proud at a distance from Him. He wishes us to be like Him, in other words, meek and humble of heart. There must be no worldly ambition, therefore, no love of honours, riches or human greatness, no inordinate affection for things or persons. There must be only a great desire to please God alone and to offer Him our whole life, including every thought and action. (4) Finally, an ardent love for Jesus, which will consume all our imperfections and unite us to Him so intimately that we shall be transformed into Him.

2. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus truly claimed that one Holy Communion made with perfect dispositions was enough to produce a saint. When we receive Holy Communion properly we are transformed into Jesus and, therefore, we become holy. We live no longer as ourselves, but we live in Jesus. Not alone are we purified of all our imperfections, but we are emptied of ourselves in order to receive Jesus into ourselves. Jesus becomes the dominant thought in our minds and the central desire of our hearts.

Holy Communion, therefore, should be a supernatural miracle which causes us to live the life of Jesus.

This is the reason why the early Christians gathered daily at the Eucharistic table. They felt the need of achieving every day the transformation of their souls into Jesus. They hungered for Jesus, they burned with love for Him; they were as one in heart and in soul.

Let us examine ourselves and see if our Communions have anything like this effect on us. *Let a man prove himself*, says St. Paul, *and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the cup; for he who eats and drinks unworthily . . . eats and drinks judgment to himself.*²

We should examine ourselves before Holy Communion and make an act of sorrow for our sins and imperfections. Then we shall be able to approach Jesus with love and confidence. We need not be afraid, for it is He Who invites us. It is He Who desires to be united with us in order to make us like Him.

3. Let us go to Him with repentance, with humility, and with love. Then He will make us holy.

Ejaculation: May the most Holy and Divine Sacrament be at all times praised and thanked.

¹ Gal. 2, 20.

² I Cor. 11, 28-29.

19th June

THE HOLY MASS

I. The sacrifice of the Mass is the noblest act of our religion. In it is renewed in a real but unbloody manner the Sacrifice of Calvary.

Jesus desired to remain with us throughout the centuries in the Blessed Eucharist as our friend, comforter, and spiritual food. Similarly, not being satisfied with having shed His precious Blood on the Cross for our redemption, it was His wish that this sacrificial action should be renewed daily in every corner of the world in such a way that everyone could participate in it and benefit from it. When we are present at Holy Mass,

therefore, we should imagine that we are on Calvary at the foot of the Cross on which our divine Redeemer is voluntarily giving His life as an innocent victim for our sins. Let us see Him hanging between earth and sky, a holocaust of propitiation between God and men. Let us see Him imploring with His dying glance forgiveness for His executioners and for us sinners.

Let us imagine, moreover, His most holy Mother as she gazes sorrowfully upon her suffering Son. With love far greater than that of any other human creature, she offers herself in union with Jesus for our salvation.

We should make a similar offering when we assist at the Sacrifice of the altar. We should sacrifice ourselves along with Jesus. If we are tormented by sufferings, let us offer them up along with those of Jesus. If we are troubled by passionate inclinations to sin, let us sacrifice these bravely along with Jesus for love of Him. If we are full of hatred and coldness towards others, let us sacrifice these feelings for love of Jesus, Who forgave everybody and prayed even for His executioners.

Let us remember that the Sacrifice of the Mass should be our sacrifice also. It is not only the priest who offers it, but we offer it along with the priest and with Jesus. "Receive, O Holy Trinity, this oblation which we make to Thee." Let us unite the offering of our entire selves to the Sacrifice of Jesus and we shall obtain great spiritual benefits.

2. Let us meditate on the fact that the Sacrifice of the Eucharist was instituted for four ends, namely:

(1) To honour God.

All the Angels and Saints of Heaven and all the human beings upon earth could not possibly honour God as He ought to be honoured, because they are creatures who derive everything which they possess from God. Only Jesus the God-Man could offer the Eternal Father the infinite honour due to Him by offering Himself.

(2) To make adequate satisfaction for all our sins.

In so far as they are a revolt against God, our sins are in a certain way infinite. This is because they offend an Infinite Being. Only Jesus, being at the same time man and God, could offer for us, His brothers, an infinite satisfaction to the Eternal Father. Only He could redeem us from the debt of crime and punishment which we had contracted by offering Himself without reserve in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

It must be explained, however, that although the Mass is of infinite value in itself, God applies this value to us in a finite way only, according to His good pleasure and according to our dispositions. For this reason we should do well to attend Mass as often as possible and with the maximum fervour.

(3) To give thanksgiving to God for all the benefits which we have received from Him.

(4) Finally, to obtain all the graces and favours of which we and other people stand in need.

The Mass is an extraordinary gift. Let us attend at Mass with recollection and devotion. It will be for us the source of every grace and virtue.

3. Let us pray:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water flowing from the side of Christ, purify me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O my good Jesus, hear me.

Hide me within Thy wounds.

Never permit me to be separated from Thee.

From the malignant enemy defend me.

At the hour of my death call me;

And bid me to come to Thee,

That with Thy Saints I may praise Thee

For everlasting ages.

Amen.

20th June

THE EUCHARISTIC LIFE

1. The Eucharist in our spiritual life could be compared to the sun in the physical life of the world. The sun gives light, heat and life. We can imagine what a terrible thing it would be if the sun set one evening and never rose again! Darkness would envelop the earth once more as at the beginning of creation. The cold would become relentless and life would be gradually extinguished everywhere. Men could for some time depend on their reserves of artificial light to illuminate their creeping agony, but life would slowly decline until it ended in death for everything and for everybody. Such would be the spiritual life without Jesus, especially without Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, Who lives amongst us as our only true Friend, Who hears, helps and nourishes us.

He is the sun of our souls, the source of our enlightenment, fervour and consolation. Are we weary and discouraged beneath the weight of our daily cross and of our sins? Let us go to Jesus and He will help us to carry our cross. He will wash away our sins and give us the supernatural strength never to sin again.

Let us unite ourselves to Jesus by frequent Communion, by a daily visit to Him in the Tabernacle, and by making a spiritual Communion whenever we cannot receive Him in the Blessed Eucharist. Let us make fervent ejaculations whenever we find our cross too heavy for us or when we are strongly tempted.

Many people go on long pilgrimages to famous Sanctuaries, such as Lourdes, Fatima and the Holy Places of Palestine. These are certainly worth while, but we should not forget that the greatest sanctuary of all is close at hand. It is in every church which contains Jesus in the Tabernacle. Here we have Jesus Himself, really present and anxious to listen to us and to help us. The Saints could find no greater joy on earth than to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

2. The Eucharistic life, which is the life of union with Jesus especially by means of daily Communion, transforms us and makes us holy. It preserves and increases in us the grace which is the supernatural life of the soul. The Eucharist of itself does not bestow grace, because it is a Sacrament of the living. It is our food, and food is not given to the dead, but to the living. For this reason we should receive Holy Communion free from the stain of sin. The Eucharist, moreover, remits venial sins, strengthens us in our resolutions, and increases our charity. Venial sin is a sickness of the soul. Just as natural food banishes listlessness and vulnerability to disease, our Eucharistic nourishment has the same effect on our spiritual life.

It is because the Blessed Eucharist increases our love for Jesus that it weakens our evil inclinations. The Eucharist and sin are mutually exclusive of one another, because the Eucharist is Jesus and sin is the devil. Our Eucharistic food, moreover, produces in our souls a spiritual consolation which is a foretaste of the happiness of Heaven. Let us listen to Jesus living within us. He will enable us to forget our worldly cares and will raise us to a higher plane where by God's infinite goodness we shall continue to grow in virtue.

3. May the Most Blessed Sacrament be for ever praised and adored.

21st June

ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA

1. St. Aloysius Gonzaga is one of the outstanding models of holy purity for young and old alike. We are told that when he was nine years of age and was in the city of Florence, he went to the Church of the Annunziata to pray before the picture of our Blessed Lady. It was then that he experienced the ardent desire to consecrate himself to God. He was the eldest son of Prince Ferdinand Gonzaga and, therefore, heir to his father's

title. But from this moment he was determined to spend his life in the service of God. He made a vow of perpetual chastity and placed himself under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

Now his life became a continual ascent towards perfection. His chastity, which he had offered to Our Lady, remained spotless until his death. The spirit of evil could make no headway against his angelic virtue. This was a grace which he merited as a result of his prayers and penances. He often spent three or four hours kneeling in prayer and contemplation. Even at night he rose from his bed in order to pray. His mind and heart were in Heaven rather than upon earth. His prayer was an intimate conversation with Jesus, Mary, and the Saints. Innocent though he was, he practised severe mortifications. Believing himself to be a great sinner, he scourged his body until his blood flowed freely, and deprived himself of food and sleep.

Do we wish to preserve our purity and to become saints? If so, let us remember that without prayer and mortification this is impossible. Jesus said to His disciples *that they must always pray and not lose heart.*¹ Pray, He said again, *that you may not enter into temptation,*² and further: *Unless you repent, you will all perish.*³

2. One might say that the entire life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga was a miracle of purity and of heroic penance. The source of his sanctity was the ardent love of God which he cherished from his childhood days. He loved God above all things and with all his strength. Therefore, long hours of prayer were a joy to him; the service of God in the Society of Jesus was his main desire; and mortification was a loving offering which he made in expiation of the sins of men.

The heart of St. Aloysius, however, was not closed to men because of its supreme love for God. His love for God overflowed into a vast love for his fellowmen. He finally fell a victim to his own heroic charity. When he was only twenty-four years of age he devoted himself so earnestly to the care of those who had been stricken down by a plague that he caught the infection

and died a peaceful death. In his final moments he smiled and announced that he was happy to be leaving this world.

Do we desire to merit as peaceful and holy a death as this? Let us imitate St. Aloysius by living lives of purity henceforth, even if we have not always been as faithful as he was in this regard. Let us imitate also his love for God and for his neighbour, his spirit of penance, and his fervour in prayer.

3. St. Aloysius, obtain for me from God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, purity of life, the spirit of penance and of prayer, and a great love for God and for my neighbour.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

² Luke 22, 40.

³ Luke 13, 5.

22nd June

FREQUENT COMMUNION

I. Even as our bodies need their daily sustenance of food to restore the energy which they have lost, so it is with our souls. The nourishment of the soul is the grace of God. There is no better way of acquiring and increasing this grace than by Holy Communion, because Communion gives us Jesus Himself, Who is the origin of grace. Spiritual perfection consists in union with God. We can achieve perfect union with God in Holy Communion, by means of which we live the life of Jesus. *He who eats me, he also shall live because of me.*¹

Anyone who loves Jesus fervently receives Holy Communion every day. If a man does not do this, it is a sign that he does not love Jesus perfectly. The early Christians were *continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in their houses;*² in other words they received Communion every day. It was Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist Who nourished their faith and gave them the strength to endure martyrdom. This custom prevailed in many places up to the time of St. Jerome and St.

Augustine, who wrote "This is your daily bread; receive it daily in order to benefit daily from it."³ To those who believed that they were unworthy to receive every day, St. Ambrose said: "A man who is unworthy to receive every day will still be unworthy in a year's time."⁴

We should not stay away from daily Communion because of our unworthiness nor because of our lapses into sin. "Because I am always sinning," said St. Ambrose, "I am always in need of medicine."⁵ Humility is the basic virtue necessary in a Christian, but it should not be a reason for abstaining from Holy Communion. St. Thomas commented that, although it may be pleasing to God to stay away from Holy Communion out of humility, He is far better pleased with the love and confidence of a soul that receives Him.⁶ The Church, like Jesus, desires us to receive Communion daily, although it only binds us under pain of sin to receive once a year during Paschaltide in accordance with the decree of Innocent III, which was confirmed by the Council of Trent. We are also required to receive the Blessed Eucharist if we are in danger of death.

2. For the practice of daily Communion, however, we should have the approval of our confessor. We should be fully determined to preserve ourselves free from every sin, especially from grave sin, for otherwise we could not approach the Eucharistic table. (If anyone receives Jesus with mortal sin on his soul, he commits a terrible sacrilege.) This practice, moreover, should help us to avoid every deliberate imperfection and venial sin, and should inspire in us a lively spirit of Christian charity. "Receive Communion every day," said St. Augustine, "because it will help you every day . . . but you must live in a manner which will entitle you to communicate daily."⁷

Frequent Communion, therefore, will enable us to set out upon the road to perfection without relaxing in our resolution and without any false scruples. "Two kinds of people," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "should receive Communion frequently: the

perfect and the imperfect; the perfect in order to preserve their holiness, the imperfect in order to reach perfection.”⁸ Let us ask the advice of our regular confessor. We shall be fortunate if we can approach the Sacred Banquet every day, or at least very often, for we shall be sure that we are on the path to holiness.

3. Heart of Jesus, burning with love for us, inflame our hearts with love for You.

¹ John 6, 58.

² Cf. Acts 2, 46.

³ De Verb. Dom., Sermon. 28.

⁴ Bk. 5, De Sacram., c. 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cf. S.Th., III, q. 8, a. 10 ad 3.

⁷ De Verbo Dom., Sermon. 28.

⁸ Introduction to the Devout Life, c. 21.

23rd June

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

1. Anyone who sincerely loves Jesus Christ will not be satisfied with receiving Him daily in the Blessed Eucharist. Often during the day he will feel the need of uniting himself again to the divine Spouse in an act of love. This is what is known as spiritual Communion. It is a natural and spontaneous act for a true lover of Jesus.

I am the vine, you are the branches, Jesus has told us. *He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit . . . as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.*¹ Since the supernatural life flows into our souls from Jesus, we must maintain our union with Him even when He is not sacramentally present. It is true that the divine grace remains in us as long as we do not fall into mortal sin, but it grows weaker under the influence of worldly attractions and temptations. It is necessary to revive the grace that is in us when we feel that it is waning. For this purpose Spiritual Communion is very useful, for it is an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament² and an outpouring of love in which we beseech Jesus to come and take complete possession

of our hearts. This practice was recommended by the Council of Trent³ and was frequently used by the Saints in order to keep alive the fire of divine charity in their souls and to guard themselves against the onslaughts of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we act in the same manner, Jesus will always be within us and we shall always be in Jesus. If God lives in us, who can harm us? *If God is for us, who is against us?*⁴

2. Jesus not only desires to come to us, but He desires to remain continually present in us with His love and grace. *If anyone love me, he will keep my word, He tells us, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.*⁵ It is enough for us to love Him and to be ready to keep His commandments. Such an act of sincere and effective love for Jesus will cause Him to enter and to remain in our hearts even after the sacramental species has been consumed. This is Spiritual Communion, which consists mainly in the yearning for Jesus. *I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?*⁶

3. St. Thomas calls the Eucharist “the Sacrament of love.”⁷ When love is ardent and sincere it longs for constant contact with the beloved. Spiritual Communion can be made in a single instant, for it requires only an act of faith and an act of love. Jesus, come into my heart, for I have need of You. I love You, my Jesus; keep me close to You always.

Ejaculation: O Jesus, I cling to You with all my heart.

¹ Cf. John 15, 4.

² S. Th., III, q. 8, a. 1 ad 3.

³ Sess. XIII, c. 8.

⁴ Rom. 8, 31.

⁵ John 14, 23.

⁶ Luke 12, 49.

⁷ Opusc. 38, 25.

24th June

BELONGING ENTIRELY TO GOD

1. Willing or unwilling, we belong entirely to God. God created us from nothing, and all that we have is His—soul and

body, material and spiritual gifts, and the world in which we live.

God has given us everything, and at any moment He can take away the life which He gave us. It is useless, indeed senseless, to rebel against Him or to try and release ourselves from His absolute dominion. Admittedly, He has given us free will and we can disobey and offend Him, but even if we do so we still belong completely to God and He has absolute power over us.

He has created us for Himself alone, for He is the final goal of all things. We can never escape from His authority.

Do we rebel and hurl towards God the cry of Satan: "I will not serve"? Even if we do, whether we are in sin or in the depths of hell we still belong to Him. We shall have to bear eternal witness to His infinite love and mercy, as well as to His infinite justice.

We have been created for God's glory, and God is glorified both in His goodness and in His justice. We should meditate deeply on this tremendous concept. How much better it is for us to belong wholly to God in love and in obedience than in the chastisement of His justice. How much better it is to obey and serve Him as our Sovereign Lord, to honour Him as our Father, and to love Him as the Spouse of our souls.

All our thoughts and desires should, therefore, be directed to Him and all our plans and actions should be offered to Him. If we are attached to worldly possessions and persons, if we are vain and ambitious, and if we yield to our passionate inclinations, our hearts do not belong completely to God. We are guilty of theft if we do not offer our hearts entirely to God, because they are entirely His. Moreover, we do ourselves a grave injury, because we can find nothing but disillusionment in the love of creatures and in the satisfaction of our senses. God alone can fully satisfy our hearts, which were made for Him alone.

2. Let us reflect on the extent to which God is deserving of all our love. He is our Creator, our final end, and our Redeemer.

Jesus was not satisfied with giving us part of Himself, but He gave us Himself completely. Although as God He was infinite, He could not have given us more.

One drop of His blood or a solitary tear would have sufficed to redeem us from our sins. But He shed His blood to the last drop and gave His life for us. Better still, He willed to remain amongst us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist as our constant spiritual nourishment.

3. What more could He have done in order to merit our love? If He has loved us as much as to give us Himself completely, why are we grudging in our relations with Him? Why do we share our hearts between Him and the world, or worse still, between Him and sin? There is nothing to prevent us from loving creatures as well as God, but they should be loved in God and for God. They should form a ladder which enables us to climb towards God. Every disproportionate affection, whether in regard to ourselves or to others, is an injury to God. If we really belong entirely to God, we should be at peace. Since virtue is difficult, it is difficult to belong completely to God, but the effort gives us a foretaste of the happiness of Heaven. If we really love God, nothing is difficult, but everything seems simple and pleasant. Perfect union with God will give us the pure joy which the Saints experienced.

25th June

PURITY OF INTENTION

1. Purity of intention consists in doing the will of God in all things from the motive of pure love. We should not be ego-centric, but theocentric; in other words, we should perform all our actions, not for our own satisfaction, but to please God. Since God is our final end, everything should be done for Him.

Why are we so often agitated and discontented? It is because we are looking for success and for the approval of men. If we do not get these, we imagine that we have failed and have accomplished nothing.

Men judge the value of an enterprise by its external success and by the amount of work which went into it. It is not so with God. He judges the value of our actions from the sincerity of our desire to please Him and to prove our love for Him. This is enough for Him; success is not necessary. If we do everything for the love of God, we shall always be content as the Saints were, whether our projects succeed or fail. We shall have achieved our purpose if we have pleased God.

Purity of intention in our actions is fundamental in the Christian life. *If thy eye be sound, Jesus Himself tells us, thy whole body will be full of life. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body will be full of darkness.*¹ *Man seeth those things that appear; but the Lord beholdeth the heart.*²

A man who works solely for the love of God will have great peace of soul in this life and an everlasting reward in the next. But if in our actions we seek our own satisfaction or the praise of men, we shall have already received our reward on earth and cannot expect to receive it in Heaven. *They have received their reward.*³

Purity of intention, inspired by the love of God, transforms even our most trivial actions and makes them pleasing to God. Without it we lose all merit in the sight of God.

Do you remember the Gospel incident of the poor widow who offered her last two coins in the Temple? Others were there offering up large sums of money, but she could not have given more. *Amen I say to you, said Jesus, this poor widow has put in more than all those who have been putting money into the treasury.*⁴

2. St. Alphonsus indicates the signs by which we can judge whether our actions are performed from the pure intention of pleasing God. (1) The first sign is that you are not disturbed

when your projects are unsuccessful, but retain the same composure as if you had succeeded. This will be the case when you are working for God alone, so that once you realise that God has not desired your efforts to succeed, you no longer desire it either. You know that He is not concerned with the outcome of your work, but only with whether you have undertaken it with the purpose of pleasing Him. (2) The second proof is that you are as pleased with the good which is worked by means of others as if it had been achieved through you. (3) The third sign is that you do not long for one position rather than another, but are content with whatever Providence has arranged for you, so that you seek only to please God in everything which you do. (4) The final proof is that you do not look for approval or gratitude because of your good actions. If you are not appreciated or are ill-treated in any way, you retain your peace of mind because you have already achieved your purpose, which was to please God by working for love of Him.⁵

3. Principles:

God alone is deserving of all our love.

We should do everything which we should wish to have done at the hour of death.

We should live on earth as if nothing else existed but God and ourselves.⁶

¹ Mt. 6, 22.

² 1 Kings 16, 7.

³ Mt. 6, 2.

⁴ Mark 12, 41-44.

⁵ Cf. Al Divino Servizio II, 7.

⁶ Cf. Al Divino Servizio II, 7.

26th June

INTERIOR MORTIFICATION

I. In the spiritual life, as in the physical order, death is the beginning of life. *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who*

*loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting.*¹

This passage of the Gospel epitomises the doctrine of Christian mortification—it is necessary to die to ourselves in order to live in God. Anyone who is full of himself and of worldly matters has no room in his heart for God. It is not possible, as St. Alphonsus points out, to fill a vase with earth and then to fill it with water. There is no room left for the water, and if a little of it enters the vase it is no longer pure water, but muddy.

We must empty ourselves of ourselves and of worldly things in order to fill ourselves with God. Jesus told us this quite clearly. *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.*²

If anyone denies himself in order to do God's will in all things, he has achieved real interior mortification. Moreover, he has perfect peace, which consists in being established in the love of God.

This does not mean that all self-love is wrong. In fact, there are two kinds of self-love. We can love our own true good, which is God, and therefore desire to live in harmony with this supreme good in this life in order to enjoy it as our eternal reward. This kind of self-love is founded on the love of God, Who is the main reason why we love ourselves. But if we prefer our own pleasure and satisfaction to God, then our self-love is disproportionate and wrong and leads us into sin.

The first thing we must do, therefore, is to mortify our inordinate self-love. In other words, we must deny ourselves in matters where self-love is keeping us apart from God, Whom we should love more than anything else in life.

2. In the process of mortifying self-love, we mortify our other passions also, because it is the origin of them all. It is as well to bear in mind, however, that no matter how much we curb our passions, they never die. We need to be always on our guard for fear that they may reassert themselves too strongly.

It is necessary for us to increase our love for God because, as

St. Augustine points out, it is divine charity which conquers our passions. Constant prayer and union with God also help us to achieve interior mortification. Prayer without mortification is an illusion which does not last long, so that it is necessary to combine fervent prayer with self-denial.

We may not be capable of the extraordinary mortifications which the Saints practised, because our health or the obligations of our state in life may make these impossible for us. But if we deny ourselves often in small matters, these will be so many steps in the ladder which will help us to reach Christian perfection.

3. Principles:

If you desire to love God and to become holy, mortification will be a source of joy.

Resist your evil inclinations at once so that they cannot grow in strength. Readily accept from God any difficulties which you encounter. Abandon yourself entirely to His will.

¹ John 12, 24-25.

² Mt. 16, 24.

27th June

EXTERNAL MORTIFICATION

1. The interior mortification of self-love and of our sensual inclinations is not enough. Bodily mortification is also necessary. St. Paul provides the reason. *The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.*¹

Original sin disturbed the perfect harmony which existed between man's body and soul. *I see another law in my members, said the Apostle Paul, warring against the law of my mind.*² Even when he was caught up to the third heaven, he experienced the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit.³

There is no such struggle between the flesh and the spirit in

brute animals, which are concerned only with the satisfaction of their sensible appetites. It is because he is endowed with reason and an immortal soul that man experiences this conflict. The result is that either the soul is conquered and becomes the slave of man's lower instincts or the soul is victorious and uses the body as an instrument of virtue.

We can see from this how necessary it is to mortify our bodies so that they will not rebel against the mastery of the soul. Our body will be either the faithful servant or the relentless tyrant of the soul.

Mortification and penance are the only methods of keeping the body under control. *I chastise my body*, says St. Paul, *and bring it into subjection*.⁴ He cites the example of competitors in the arena who abstain from everything which could prevent them winning. If they are prepared to do this, he adds, in order to *gain a perishable crown*, we should be even more prepared to abstain from anything which could interfere with us obtaining an everlasting reward.⁵

Unless you repent, Our Lord had already said, *you will all perish*.⁶ The Saints appreciated the severity of this warning and subjected themselves to incredible mortifications such as lengthy fasts, bloody scourgings, and privation of sleep and personal comforts.

What penances do I perform? Little or none, perhaps? If so, it is not surprising that my body rebels and causes me to fall into sin. We must follow the example of the Saints in this matter if we wish to remain in the state of grace.

2. In the first place, we must accept with resignation from the hands of Christ all the sufferings and humiliations which we encounter during life. Not only should we accept them, but we should offer them to God as a proof of our love. The Saints were happy to suffer for the sake of Jesus; we should at least suffer with resignation in expiation of our sins. This is still not enough, however. *They who belong to Christ*, St. Paul warns us,

have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.⁷ Salvation is impossible without voluntary penance.⁸ It is false piety to insist that we should not treat cruelly the body which God has given us. Such an attitude of indulgence could cause the loss of the soul, which is a far greater treasure. As St. Paul writes, *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us.*⁹

Suffering voluntarily undertaken for the sake of Jesus purifies the soul and gives us a great peace when we see the body subdued and converted into an instrument for the sanctification of ourselves and of others.

3. *Principle:* So great is the happiness which is in store for me that it is a pleasure for me to suffer. (St. Francis of Assisi.)

¹ Gal. 5, 17.

² Rom. 7, 23.

³ 2 Cor. 12, 7.

⁴ 1 Cor. 9, 27.

⁵ Ibid. 25.

⁶ Luke 13, 5.

⁷ Gal. 5, 24.

⁸ Cf. Luke 13, 5.

⁹ Rom. 8, 18.

28th June

STEADFASTNESS IN SUFFERING

1. We are all obliged to suffer in soul and body. Suffering begins at birth and ends at death. "The whole life of a Christian is a cross,"¹ says St. Augustine. For this reason we have to develop the virtue of patience. *Let patience have its perfect work,* says St. James, *that you may be perfect and entire.*² If we are to be perfect, we must accept sufferings and trials from the hands of God and offer them to Him in a spirit of harmony with His holy will. In this way all our actions become valuable, for they are acts of reparation and of love which will be rewarded in Heaven. Both our joys and our sorrows are sanctified if we offer them to God, Who arranges everything for our own good. The Saints longed to suffer because they loved God and knew that suffering is the only true way in which we can prove our love. Suffering is the

best medicine for the soul, for when it is endured with patience it purifies us and prepares us for Heaven. "If God does not punish you for your sins," says St. Augustine, "it is a sign that you are no longer counted among His sons."³ *Whom the Lord loves, he chastises*, St. Paul writes, *and he scourges every son whom he receives.*⁴

Suffering is in fact a gift from God. It reminds us that we have not been created for this world, but for Heaven, in preparation for which we must carry our cross with patience in the footsteps of Jesus. No matter what we do, we must suffer. Either we bear trials patiently and gain an increase of merit, or we rebel against them and gain no merit at all. When we suffer, let us think of the two thieves, both of whom were tortured in the same way. But the good thief accepted his torments with patience in reparation for his sins and was saved, while the bad thief rebelled against his sufferings and was most probably damned forever.

2. When we feel depressed, or when we are tempted to strike out angrily against human injustice and misunderstanding, there are two considerations which should help us to be patient. (1) The first is the reflection that everything comes to us from God or is at least permitted by Him. Why should we rebel against the will of God? Jesus was innocence itself, yet He willed to suffer for love of us. Are we unwilling to suffer for love of Him? (2) The second is the realisation that we are sinners who have offended God many times and deserve to be punished. It is necessary to accept patiently all the sufferings which God sends us in expiation of our sins. *We are receiving what our deeds deserved.*⁵ Above all, we ought to resolve never to give way to anger in word or in deed when we are offended. On these occasions we should wait until we have calmed down and have asked God for peace of mind. Before we do anything we need time for reflection and prayer. If we act in this way we shall not have to be sorry afterwards. Patience can help us to achieve anything and will eventually help us to gain Heaven.

3. *Christ has suffered for you, leaving you an example that you may follow in his steps.*⁶

¹ Serm. 31.² James 1, 4.³ St. Aug., Lib. de Pass., c. 5.⁴ Heb. 12, 6.⁵ Luke 23, 41.⁶ 1 Peter 2, 21.

29th June

ST. PETER, PRINCE OF THE APOSTLES

1. Jesus was walking one day along the shore of the Sea of Galilee when He saw two fishermen casting their nets into the water. He approached them and said: *Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*¹ These two fishermen were brothers named Simon and Andrew. The divine Master won their hearts immediately, so that they left their boat and their nets and followed Jesus. Simon was later called Peter and became the leader of the Apostles.

Peter's generosity and great love for Jesus are evident in the pages of the Gospel. When our Lord foretold the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, many of His disciples were scandalised and left Him. "Do you also wish to go away?" Jesus asked His Apostles. St. Peter answered Him without delay. *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.*² On another occasion Jesus asked His disciples: *Who do men say the Son of Man is?* The Apostles hesitated and began to suggest the names of various Prophets. But St. Peter was inspired to make the reply: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Then our Lord appointed him Head of the Church. *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona . . . 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 whrtever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.*³ By

these words there was instituted the loftiest and most ancient of the dynasties, the Papacy. The successors of St. Peter will rule the Church to the end of time and no power, neither persecution nor heresy, neither human tyranny nor false civilisation, will ever succeed in destroying this citadel of truth and goodness.

When a band of hired ruffians arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples were terrified and did nothing. Peter was the only one to show any courage, drawing his sword in defence of his divine Master. Later Jesus was brought in chains before the Sanhedrin and was condemned to death. Peter had not the heart to leave Him to His fate. He was too generous for that, even if he was too hasty and went on to deny Jesus three times. But he repented quickly and regretted his fault for the rest of his life. Even in his sin we can discern Peter's generosity of spirit.

Before he went to Rome, Peter had flouted the authority of the Synagogue of Jerusalem and had endured prison and undertaken long journeys in the course of his mission. Providence brought him to Rome, where he established the Roman Church which he was to sanctify by the shedding of his blood. He was crucified close to the Vatican hill from which his successors would one day govern the Christian world. His martyrdom bestowed an invincible strength upon the Church for all time.

2. It is good to admire the fidelity of St. Peter and the designs of divine Providence in making him the visible Head of the Church, but it is far better to follow his example. His love for Jesus led him to leave his family and his fisherman's trade in order to follow Our Lord. It led him to undertake long voyages, to endure imprisonment, and to face martyrdom. What can we do for the love of Jesus? Remember that if love is to be sincere it must be generous and effective.

Secondly, let us meditate on and imitate the ardent and fearless faith of St. Peter. He was not afraid to preach the teaching of Christ before the Sanhedrin. He was not afraid of Herod, who

cast him into prison. He was not afraid of the Roman Emperor, who caused him to be crucified. Our faith should be steadfast and lively like his.

Finally, let us imitate Peter in his repentance. Although he loved Jesus very much and had such great faith in Him, in a moment of weakness and of imprudence he denied Him three times. All his life, however, he wept bitterly for this sin. Whenever he heard a cock crowing, it was as if an arrow had pierced his heart. He was not satisfied until he was hanging upon the cross like his divine Master and could prove his love for Jesus by a martyr's death.

3. Protect your people, O Lord, and keep them safe always, trusting as they do in the protection of your Apostles, Peter and Paul. Amen.

¹ Mark 1, 17.

² John 6, 69.

³ Mt. 16, 15-19.

30th June

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE

1. St. Paul was by nature fiery and zealous. Once he discovered the truth, he was ready to die for it. Originally he was convinced that Judaism contained the whole truth, and for this reason he hated the Christians, whom he regarded as a sect which had corrupted the sacred Hebrew tradition. The deacon Stephen was the first victim of his persecuting zeal. As he was being stoned and beaten to death this saintly young man prayed for his persecutors. It may be that in this moment his eyes, shining with faith and love, encountered those of the man who hated him. Soon afterwards Saul (this was Paul's real name) left Jerusalem for Damascus carrying letters investing him with new powers for the persecution of the infant Church. On the way this headstrong but sincere enemy of Christianity was suddenly dazzled

by a light from Heaven. He fell to the ground and heard a mysterious voice saying: *Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?* Terrified, he answered: *Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus*, the voice said, *whom thou art persecuting.*¹ From that day Saul was changed completely. Under the influence of divine grace he became the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Before he set out on his missionary journeys Paul went apart into the desert of Arabia,² where he remained some time in prayer and recollection. Then he went to Jerusalem to pay homage to the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter.³ After this he began his apostolic travels, in the course of which he encountered all kinds of hardship and danger. The Jews frequently hunted him in order to put him to death. He was often cruelly scourged and flung into prison, and several times he was shipwrecked and had miraculous escapes from death.⁴ He bore everything joyfully however, in order to prove his love for Jesus Christ. Charity was always his main incentive. *The love of Christ impels us.*⁵ Charity, he said himself, *believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*⁶ His charity was so great that he could truthfully say: *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not inflamed?*⁷

St. Paul could make this claim because his heart had become identified with the Heart of Jesus. Therefore he could say: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me;*⁸ and: *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain;*⁹ and: *I am hard pressed from both sides—desiring to depart and to be with Christ, a lot by far the better; yet to stay on in the flesh is necessary for your sake.*¹⁰

Let us meditate on this ardent love of God. Let us cast aside our coldness and indifference and ask St. Paul to set us on fire with divine charity.

2. We can learn other virtues from St. Paul besides his zealous love for God and for his fellowmen. We can also learn from him the virtues of humility and of apostolic fervour. The Apostle of the Gentiles reached such heights of sanctity as to feel himself

transformed into Christ Himself and to deserve to be taken up into the third Heaven where he enjoyed a foretaste of eternal happiness. Nevertheless, he considered himself unworthy to be called an Apostle and realised that all his gifts came to him from God. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*¹¹ Whenever we succeed in any project we should think on the same lines, because it is only when we are humble and depend on the grace of God that the success of our actions will redound to the glory of our Creator. If the cancer of ambition or of self-love should corrupt our purity of intention, our work would not be blessed by God and would not make us worthy of everlasting life. Let us repeat often: "All for You, with You and in You, my God."

3. "Always breathe the life of Christ; place your trust in Him; and live as if every day were your last."¹²

¹ Acts 9, 1-5.

² Cf. Gal. 1, 17.

³ Gal. 1, 18.

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 11, 23-27.

⁵ 2 Cor. 5, 14.

⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 13, 4-13.

⁷ 2 Cor. 11, 29.

⁸ Gal. 2, 20.

⁹ Phil. 1, 21.

¹⁰ Phil. 1, 23-24.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 3, 5.

¹² St. Athanasius, "Life of St. Anthony," n. 91.

JULY

1st July

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

1. Such is the speed of modern life that many people forget God and do not even pause to think about themselves. Action is everything. There is no time for reflection, no time for prayer. Life has become mechanical and superficial, for nobody has the time nor the inclination to think about spiritual matters.

What is the result? Since men are not machines but living beings composed of soul and body, and are capable of feeling and of passion, their lower inclinations break loose and insist on being satisfied. In the absence of prayer and of all effort to lead a good life, grace is lacking to inspire the mind, to strengthen the will and to keep the heart pure. Rapid materialistic progress has accustomed men to accept as inevitable the most shameful falls. The absence of any kind of contact with God makes the soul the slave of sin.

Examine yourself. Perhaps you have not yet sunk to this low level of spirituality and are still capable of feeling remorse and the urge to do good. But you must listen for God's voice, and a certain amount of silence is necessary if His voice is not to be drowned in the tumult of the world. We are in real need of solitude, recollection and prayer.

2. Even though the Apostles lived in times which were very different from ours, they were asked by our divine Master to spend a little time in solitude and recollection. They had been sent by Jesus to preach in the villages of Palestine and had been successful in their mission. When they returned they told our

divine Redeemer with some satisfaction what they had accomplished in His name and with His grace. They may have been inclined to boast a little, and it is quite certain that they had become spiritually dissipated as a result of their work. So Jesus said to them: *Come apart into a desert place and rest a while.*¹

We must take this advice also, for a certain amount of silence and recollection is absolutely essential. We should go on retreat every year and set aside one day every month for the same purpose. We need to spend at least a quarter of an hour every day in meditation, if possible a quarter of an hour in conversation with Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist or, if we cannot do any better, an interval of prayer in some other secluded place. If we have not been doing at least this much, let us make sure to do so in future.

3. Solitude and recollection will make our lives more peaceful and more purposeful and will enable us to co-operate with God's grace by striving to become more perfect. *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind*, says St. Paul, *and put on the new man, which has been created according to God in justice and in holiness.*²

The turmoil of a purely external life leads to hardness of heart, tepidity and sin. Recollection and prayer place us in contact with God, Who will give us the grace to lead holy lives.

¹ Mark 6, 31; Mt. 14, 13; Luke 9, 10; John 6, 1.

² Eph. 4, 23-24.

2nd July

THE TABERNACLE LAMP

1. We should find time every day to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Jesus Christ is present in all the churches of the world as a voluntary prisoner of love. He is waiting for us. *I will not leave you orphans,*¹ He promised, for He loves us with an infinite love

which knows no limits of time or place. He has been there throughout the centuries in every corner of the globe, from the splendid cathedrals in the noisy cities to the humble little chapels of the lonely Missions. No matter where we go, we can find the King of Kings enthroned within the Tabernacle, waiting lovingly for us.

Since we need Him so much, why do we not go to Him? We have many things to do, but this is the first and most necessary. It will often require some little sacrifice to spend a quarter of an hour before the Tabernacle, but nothing good can ever be achieved without sacrifice.

Moreover, Jesus deserves this sacrifice, for did He not give Himself entirely for us? Does He not continue to sacrifice Himself in the Sacrament and in the Sacrifice of the altar? Let us go to Jesus every day and we shall find comfort for our souls.

When we kneel in front of the Tabernacle and speak with Jesus, we shall feel confident that He is listening to us. We shall be certain that He sympathises with our weaknesses, understands our needs, and is anxious to enrich us with His graces.

2. Look up at the lamp quietly glowing before the Tabernacle in honour of the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus. We also should be like living lamps of love.

The lamp burns night and day in the Presence of Jesus and burns itself out for Him. For what do we wear out our lives? In useless and unnecessary projects, perhaps for worldly reasons, for the satisfaction of our own ego or of our passions? We shall certainly never find peace this way, but only disillusionment and remorse.

The lamp is a light in the darkness. Our lives should be a light of good example to others.

The lamp has a flame which gives heat. We should burn with love for God, our one and only good, and for all men, whom we should regard as our brothers in Jesus Christ.

The lamp is raised above the ground and is suspended from

the ceiling by three chains. We should be above earthly things and should be attached to Heaven by the three chains of faith, hope and charity. As the lamp opens out only on top, so should we be open to Heavenly inspirations and closed to worldly preoccupations. God should be the centre of our thoughts, and our lives should be dedicated to Him. In this way we shall find peace on earth and happiness hereafter.

3. The Tabernacle lamp keeps Jesus company by night and by day. We should keep Him company too. We could not remain on our knees for ever in front of the Tabernacle; neither could most of us spend as long as the Saints did in intimate conversation with Jesus. But our hearts can remain with Jesus and can burn with love for Him like the flame of the lamp. It is easy to remain in union with Jesus by doing everything, even the most unimportant actions, from the motive of love for Him. We can offer Him all our sufferings and joys, and whatever sacrifices we make in order to remain good. As the magnetic needle of the mariner's compass is fixed in the direction of the north, so our thoughts and affections should be always turned towards Jesus.

¹ John 14, 18.

3rd July

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

1. The Good Shepherd is the theme of two of the most moving passages of the Gospel.

I am the good shepherd, Jesus says. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. But the hireling, who is not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep . . . I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, even as the Father

knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.¹

What man of you having a hundred sheep, He says elsewhere, and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing. And on coming home he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost." 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.²

These texts vividly describe God's mercy towards poor sinners.

We may often have been amongst the lost sheep which are separated from the flock of Jesus Christ. We found, perhaps, the poisoned pastures of error and vice and strayed from the path of truth and goodness. But what happened? We experienced disillusionment and remorse and knew that we had lost our only real good, which is God. How sad our fate would have been if the Good Shepherd, Jesus, had not come to look for us and to enlighten us with His grace. We should have been lost for ever in the desert of sin.

2. Now read another touching Gospel parable. *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." And he divided his means between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered up all his wealth, and took his journey into a far country; and there he squandered his fortune in loose living. And after he had spent all, there came a grievous famine over that country, and he began himself to suffer want. And he went and joined one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his farm to feed swine. And he longed to fill himself with the pods that the swine were eating, but no one offered to give them to him.*

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many hired men in my father's house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing here with hunger! 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; make me as one of thy hired men." And he arose and went to his father.

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. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son." But the father said to his servants, "Fetch quickly the best robe and put it on him, and give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet; and bring out the fatted 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."³

3. More than anything else in Scripture, this parable proclaims God's mercy towards sinners. Even if we have fallen, there is no need to be afraid, for the helping hand of God is stretched out to raise us up. Everything will be forgiven as long as we are sincerely repentant like the prodigal son. Remember that the mercy and justice of God are equally infinite.

¹ John 10, 11-15.

² Cf. Luke 15, 4-7.

³ Cf. Luke 15, 11-24.

4th July

THE NEW LIFE

1. "Only a Christian," wrote Tertullian, "can be wise, sincere, and lofty."¹

He had in mind, of course, the true follower of Jesus Christ who is practising the precepts of Our Lord. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*² *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*³

A man who loves God above all things can fairly be called wise. God is the supreme good and as such should be the final end towards which we direct all our thoughts and actions. If anyone adopts his own ego or some created good as his goal in

life, he is not wise because he has upset the proper scale of values. It is not true to say that we should love ourselves before anything else, because we are creatures who belong to God and should refer everything to Him. Only if we love God above all things, even above ourselves, can we really be said to love ourselves. How can we love ourselves if, in the first place, we do not love our highest good, which is God? Since this love must be active, it makes us faithful to God's commandments and raises us above the rest of creation to a state of immediate dependence on God. A love of all mankind flows as a natural consequence from this union of love with God. If we regard all men as our brothers in Jesus Christ, we shall be perfect Christians in the manner intended by our divine Redeemer when He desired us to be like His heavenly Father. This is the new life which Jesus came to bring into the world and which we should nurture in ourselves.⁴

2. Anyone who takes life seriously in the Christian sense will regard it as a difficult journey towards perfection and towards God. This journey will be at the same time painful and joyful. On the way there will be troubles which will sadden us and vices which will impede our progress. Our falls and defeats will cause us to be disheartened. But there will also be the grace of God to enlighten and encourage us. It is our own loss if we sit down lazily on the side of the road which should lead us to Heaven. It is even more disastrous if we acknowledge defeat and lay down the spiritual weapons of prayer and renunciation in order to surrender ourselves to sin or to indifference. Every day we should say to ourselves in the presence of God: A new life is beginning.

3. All this is hard and may demand heroism. *The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force.*⁵ We have to do violence to ourselves and to our passions, but virtue has its reward not only in Heaven but even in this life. This reward is the peace of soul which God bestows on us after we have overcome our perverse inclinations.

Holiness brings with it a spiritual youth which will never pass away. A new life is beginning!

¹ Tertull., *De praescript.*, 3. ² Mt. 22, 37; Mark 12, 30; Luke 10, 27.

³ Mt. 5, 48. ⁴ Cf. Heb. 4, 23-24. ⁵ Mt. 11, 12.

5th July

A LADDER ASCENDING TO GOD

1. Nature shows forth the power and beauty of God. When we gaze at the sky on a clear night, countless millions of stars seem to look back at us like so many shining eyes wishing to remind us of God's greatness. These brilliant pin-points of light are really immense bodies, often much larger than our own globe. God created them and flung them into space, where He fixed for them the orbits which they must travel every year throughout the ages. They carry out their Creator's plan at every moment, never deflecting in the slightest from their course. If they were to do so, the result would be an universal catastrophe.

Everything in the firmament obeys God's law. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*¹ The further Science advances, the more wonderful appear God's power and greatness. Our ancestors wove legends about the bright belt of stars which ploughed its milky way through the firmament, but to-day we know that this apparent conglomeration of gleaming dust consists of other worlds and far away systems of planets. We should feel humble in the presence of so much beauty and harmony. Let us adore and love the omnipotent Creator of such wonders.

2. Let us lower our eyes now and observe the world around us. Here again everything speaks to us of God, for everything is a reflection of His power and goodness. From the tiny flower which opens its perfumed petals to the dawn and closes them again to the sunset as if in an act of self-effacement before its

Creator, to the pines and cedars of the forest, all nature seems to send up a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. We are surrounded by marvels, but the greatest of them all is man, the lord of the universe. The beauty and order which we admire in creatures are concentrated in him; the eye, the ear, and the tongue are among the extraordinary gifts which his body has received from God. But when we pass from the body to the soul, that spiritual flame which God has kindled in us, we have reached an object of wonder far surpassing the splendour of material things. A mind which is capable of thought and reasoning and a heart which is capable of love belong not merely to this world but are a living image of our Creator. It is for Him, therefore, that the intellect should function; it is He that the heart should love.

3. How often, nevertheless, is our mind led astray by the passing beauty of this world. How often is our heart engrossed in a search for a happiness which is purely illusory. God has given us created things so that we may see in them a reflection of His goodness and beauty and may use them as a ladder which will lead us to Him. We shall be lost if we look back and fall beneath the false spell of this earthly fairyland. Our minds and hearts should look upwards towards Heaven.

God alone can satisfy the infinite desires of the soul. Let us never lose sight of Him. Everything else passes, but God does not change. He will be our sure guide in this life and our everlasting happiness in the next.

¹ Ps. 18, 2.

6th July

THE GIFT OF SPEECH

1. One of God's greatest gifts, the spoken word, is the reflection of our thought and the expression of our will. In God

the Word is something infinitely greater, for it is the substantial image of God, the Eternal Word of the Father through Whom He knows and therefore loves Himself. It is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Because we have been created in the likeness of God, our Creator has endowed us also with a limited power to express our thoughts and sentiments.

It is hard to imagine how unhappy we should be if we could not express ourselves and were unable to communicate our ideas and feelings to others. We should feel as isolated as rocks separated from one another by vast expanses of sea, for we could neither give anything of ourselves to other men nor receive anything in return. We could not even praise God and tell Him how we love Him. God could have created us without the gift of speech. Since He has given it to us, we should show our gratitude by using it for His glory, for our welfare, and for the salvation of our neighbour.

2. Above all, the gift of speech is intended to be used in prayer. The tongue should express externally the interior language of the mind and heart, which should be principally concerned with the adoration of our Creator. Since we have received everything which we have from God, all our gifts should be used in His service. Speech was given to us not only to enable us to speak with men, but more particularly to enable us to speak with God. Let us sanctify this gift by means of prayer. Let us take care, however, that our prayers do not remain meaningless and superficial while our minds are absorbed with other matters.

Everything in us should pray. The intellect should bow in adoration of God's majesty; the will should conform itself entirely to His law; the heart should find its true and only happiness in God; and the tongue should praise Him, implore His favour and forgiveness, and offer our whole being to Him from Whom we have received everything. This should be the primary function of speech. If this gift is employed in this way,

it will gain for us many other graces and favours from God.

3. Speech was never intended to be used in lying and in deceiving our neighbour, nor in giving scandal by unkind or blasphemous conversation. It was given to us so that we might help others by conversation which would reflect our own interior goodness and so lead them towards sanctity. It was intended to express sympathy and understanding, to give good advice, and to encourage others.

The tongue can do a great deal of good or a great deal of damage.

Let us examine our consciences now. If we have failed to employ the gift of speech for our own welfare and that of our neighbour, let us begin to correct this neglect. Let us resolve to use this gift in the service of God and in the work of the Christian Apostolate.

7th July

UNCHARITABLENESS

1. It is easy, unfortunately, to abuse the gift of speech which God has given us. *If anyone does not offend in word*, says St. James, *he is a perfect man.*¹ "As often as I have been amongst men," says the *Imitation of Christ*, "I have returned less a man."² Why is this so? It is because it is easy when we are in the company of men to enter into useless and even harmful discussions. As a result we lose the purity of intention which we ought to observe in all our thoughts, words and actions. We lose the spirit of recollection which keeps us in contact with God, and when we return home we are less perfect Christians because we are dissipated in mind and in heart.

It is true that if we were really holy and were accustomed to speak with people holier than ourselves, our conversations would

be spiritually beneficial to us. We should go away more perfect men and closer to God than we were before. But what kind of conversations do we normally have with others? What kind of relations have we with our friends, with our superiors and inferiors, and with everyone whom we meet? Are our conversations inspired by a love for truth and charity and by a desire for the spiritual welfare of ourselves and of our neighbour?

Let us examine ourselves in this important matter and resolve that our conversations will be a means of sanctification for ourselves and others.

2. The tendency to complain about others is a most insidious cancer which can corrode all that is good in our conversation, making it harmful and even gravely sinful. Grumbling is always more or less sinful according to the circumstances. It may be a sin against charity, which demands that we love our neighbour as ourselves and help him as much as possible by word and by deed. It may be a sin of scandal, because the person to whom we are complaining may be provoked to throw stones in his turn at the subject of our detraction. It may be a sin of theft because it takes away the reputation of the person whom we are criticising. This could carry with it the obligation to make restitution by withdrawing what we have said if it is false or doubtful or by speaking charitably of the person whom we have wronged in order to restore his good name. Uncharitableness in speech is also a sin of injustice when it involves calumny, in which case there is an obligation to repair the damage done in the best way possible.

Since criticism of others can be such an evil thing, we should take care not to form the habit of employing it as a means of making our conversations more lively and acceptable. The life of a Christian should be governed by charity, and grumbling about others is always an offence against charity.

3. It is no excuse to claim that we only speak of matters which are true and known to all. They may be true, but God alone

can judge the human conscience. They may be known to all, but by our maliciousness we are spreading evil about our neighbour, whereas we ought to try and spread only what is good. Besides being opposed to Christian charity, unkind conversation ruins whatever opportunities we may have of practising the apostolate, in which everyone is obliged to play his part. If we are apostolic, we promote our neighbour's spiritual welfare, whereas uncharitable criticism spreads evil about him and gives bad example to others.

¹ James 3, 2.

² Bk. I, c. 20, 2.

8th July

FALLING INTO SIN

1. *The just man falls seven times,*¹ says the Book of Proverbs. Unfortunately, we have all experienced how true this is. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.*²

We fall often in many ways—in thought, in speech, in action, and by omission. Sometimes we fall in a moment of weakness or of impatience; at other times we sin by an act of premeditated malice. *Watch and pray*, Our Lord warns us, *that you may not enter into temptation.*³

Our Lord also said that we *must always pray and not lose heart.*⁴ In other words, we should have a spirit of prayer which is based on the love of God and keeps us close to Him. It is only when we are united to God that temptations cannot hurt us and we are protected by His grace from falling into deliberate sin.

It is idle to protest that this would require the virtue of an anchorite, and that we are entangled in all kinds of other business. Virtue is necessary for everybody, not only for anchorites. *The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force.*⁵ In order to attain to the kingdom of

God, therefore, we have to do violence to our corrupted nature. A life of solitude is not essential for prayer, however. One can be busy from morning till night and pray continuously, so that his work is offered to God and done for the love of God. In this way work becomes prayer and will save us from falling into sin.

2. When we realise that we have fallen, what should we do about it? We must avoid two extreme and opposing kinds of reaction—hardness of heart, and an excessive anxiety which might lead to discouragement and loss of confidence in God's infinite mercy. Above all, we must avoid hardness of heart, and that accompanying state of indifference which causes us to become immersed in sin. Let us hope that we shall never foolishly boast: *I have sinned, yet what has befallen me? for the Lord bides his time. Of forgiveness be not over-confident, adding sin upon sin.*⁶ When we see that we have fallen into sin, let us cry out at once like the prodigal son: *I will get up and go to my Father.*⁷ How unfortunate I am if I have lost the friendship of God! But God is an infinitely merciful father and I must throw myself into His arms and implore His forgiveness. When we have sinned, a good confession will give us God's forgiveness and peace of soul.

3. The second extreme to be avoided is discouragement, which can lead us to despair as Judas did. We know that God is entirely good and merciful. We know that Jesus died on the Cross for our salvation. How can we doubt that He will welcome us if we repent and return to Him?

No matter how grave and how numerous our sins may be, let us remember that the mercy of God is infinite. Let us remember that He is waiting for us, as his father waited for the prodigal son, and that He is following us like a shepherd who is searching for his lost sheep. He allowed us to fall in order to humble us and help us to realise that we are incapable of doing

anything good by ourselves. Let us go to Him humbly and penitently, trusting that He will give us the kiss of peace and forgiveness.

¹ Prov. 24, 16.

⁵ Mt. 11, 12.

² Cf. 1 John 1, 8.

⁶ Ecclus. 5, 4-5.

³ Mt. 26, 41.

⁷ Luke 15, 18.

⁴ Luke 18, 1

9th July

VANITY

1. God was perfectly happy in Himself from all eternity and did not need any creature to add to His glory. Nevertheless, in order to diffuse His Power and goodness He created our world in which is reflected the harmony of His Divine Essence. Even as all things have their origin in Him, they have Him as their final end. He is the eternal harbour towards which all created things flow, even as the rivers roll continually onwards until they reach the peace of the sea. In this vast world of solar systems rotating in the firmament, of mineral and vegetable wealth and of animal creation, you are only a very tiny being who has received everything from God. Nevertheless, you are often convinced that you are important. You glory in your talents as if they belonged to you and were not a gift which God has given to you.

Vanity is a form of theft. God has given us everything, including life itself, and we act as if His gifts were our rightful possession. We boast about them, show them off in the company of others, and are delighted when we receive praise or respect. Let us imagine that we are dying and shall soon be alone in the presence of God. At that supreme moment what will earthly glory matter to us? Of what account will be human flattery and transitory success? When we are alone before God, nothing will matter except humility and the merits which we have gained.

These will make us worthy of God's friendship and of a heavenly reward.

2. Vanity destroys whatever is good in our actions and makes them useless in the sight of God. It robs our good actions of all merit because they should be done only for the glory of God, whereas we are performing them for our own glory. We want them to be seen by others so that we shall be honoured by men as noble and holy.

If our actions have been motivated by self-interest rather than by the desire for the glory of God, we shall hear at the judgment seat of God the terrible condemnation: *You have received your reward.*¹ If we have sought our own satisfaction instead of God's glory during our lifetime, we shall not receive an everlasting reward.

3. *What hast thou, asks St. Paul, that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?*² Whenever we are tempted to be proud or boastful, let us reflect on these words of the Apostle of the Gentiles. In spite of the miracles which he had worked and the sacrifices which he had endured for the love of Jesus, he said: *I am nothing.*³

If we model our lives on this outstanding example we shall have peace on earth and an everlasting reward in Heaven.

¹ Cf. Mt. 6, 2.

² 1 Cor. 4, 7.

³ 2 Cor. 12, 11.

10th July

THE GOOD ODOUR OF CHRIST

1. Everyone has an attractive side to his personality which can draw others towards good or towards evil, for a man's behaviour, countenance, and conversation reflect his inner spirit. Charm is very often a mysterious and undefinable quality. Sometimes you may meet a man of the world who has forgotten

that he has an immortal soul and lives purely for pleasure. Even before he speaks to you, you can read on his lips and in his eyes the kind of man he is. If you fail to resist and to do your best to remain on a higher plane, you will be overwhelmed by the charm of his personality.

You can also encounter charm, however, in a privileged soul who is in constant contact with God. You can find it in the monk who has left the world in order to meditate on God and to pray for his own salvation and for the salvation of his brothers in Christ. You can meet it in a Saint, one of those rare men who lives in the world but thinks all the time of God. When you encounter this supernatural charm, you experience a longing to be good and holy also.

You can see a reflection of Heaven in the eyes of a Saint. When he speaks to you, words which if uttered by somebody else would have no force, stir you and urge you towards all that is good. What exactly is this quality of attractiveness? It is "the sweet odour of Christ," the spiritual fragrance of virtue. Anyone who met St. Aloysius Gonzaga felt a yearning to be pure. Anyone who heard the unadorned sermons of the Curé d'Arles wept for his sins and was set on fire with the love of God and the desire of everlasting happiness. It was the same with all the Saints. Do we influence others in this way?

2. What quality of attraction do I possess? My behaviour is the mirror of my spiritual life. If I love God and am detached from the world, especially from sin, and if I practise mortification and strive to advance in the way of Christian perfection, my personality will influence others to do good. My good example rather than my words will have a spiritual appeal for others, so that I shall be a living sermon.

Words are heard, but example attracts. It is a great misfortune for me if my sins, tepidity or vices are the true reflection of my spiritual state and lead others into evil also.

3. I ought to examine the way in which I behave in the

church, in my family, and in society. When I am in the church, my whole being should be absorbed in prayer. My mind should be occupied with God, my heart should love Him, and my lips should praise and thank Him. Anyone who sees me praying should wish to do the same.

When I am in my own home, I should promote peace and harmony by my good example. The family is like a miniature church in which everyone should exercise some priestly function in keeping with his position.

Finally, I should carry about in society 'the good odour of Christ,' the fragrance of my interior holiness. I can do this if I am not ashamed of my Christian faith and if I act constantly in perfect accordance with the evangelical precepts.

When I have examined myself on these points, I should form resolutions which will help me to improve my behaviour.

Iith July

THE ENEMIES OF THE SOUL

I. It is Christian teaching that we have three enemies which are a constant threat to our salvation. The first is the devil, an invisible but very powerful foe.

The devil was once an angel of beauty. He had gifts superior to those of men and was in a state of happiness. But God required from him a proof of his fidelity before he could merit the everlasting reward for which he had been destined.

Lucifer was proud of his beauty and power. Believing that he was equal to the Most High God, he rebelled against his Creator and drew with him into eternal ruin innumerable bands of disloyal angels. Their sin was greater than ours because they had been endowed with a superior intellect and their will was not subject to the pull of the sensitive appetites of a material body.

This is why God did not give them time to repent but condemned them immediately to the everlasting torments of Hell. It is false to imagine, however, that they are confined, as it were, in one place. Being pure spirits, they can with God's permission wander throughout the world, carrying their hell within themselves. Moreover, they can endanger in a thousand ways our eternal salvation. The Gospel often speaks of diabolical temptations and obsessions, and St. Peter warns us to be continually on our guard against the onslaughts of the enemy. *Be sober, he says, be watchful! For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same suffering befalls your brethren all over the world.*¹

It is the same now as it was in the time of Jesus and His Apostles.

We do not see this infernal spirit, but we feel his presence. Let us remember what St. Augustine wrote about him. "The devil," he said, "is a mastiff in chains. He can bark, but he cannot bite unless we yield to his evil suggestions and approach him. Watch and pray."

2. The second enemy is the world. There are so many beautiful things around us, reflecting the power and the goodness of God. These should be an invitation to us to love their Creator, and a spiritual ladder which leads us towards Him. Unfortunately, we often go astray in the midst of the passing beauty of this world. Often we set our hearts upon this beauty, our hearts which should belong wholly to God and which can find peace and happiness in Him alone. Sometimes worldly objects deceive the senses and ensnare the will. Riches, pleasures, and honours attract us and we fail to remember that everything on earth passes like a shadow and that when we shall stand before the judgment seat of God, only our good works will accompany us.

3. Our most terrible enemy, however, is in ourselves—our body, which by sinning can rebel against the soul and against

God. *The flesh lusts against the spirit*, says St. Paul, *and the spirit against the flesh.*² Although he had reached the highest peak of sanctity, Paul still complained of the temptations of the flesh, which continued to buffet his soul like messengers of Satan.³

We experience carnal urges far more strongly than he did. We should resist them by faith and by prayer, keeping close to Almighty God. It is fatal to lay down our arms, for the flesh with its evil designs will seize its advantage and become the relentless tyrant of the soul. Then, under the guise of satisfying our desires, it will make us unhappy in this life and will condemn us for ever in the next.

¹ 1 Peter 5, 8.

² Gal. 5, 17.

³ 2 Cor. 12, 7.

12th July

THE GRACE OF GOD

I. God has endowed us with wonderful corporal and spiritual gifts, creating us after His own image with powers of intellect and of will. More than this, He has raised us to the supernatural order by communicating to us His grace, which enables us to live His own life and to share in His divine nature as His adopted sons.

Grace is the greatest gift which God has given us. It enlightens our minds and moves our will to obey His commands and to perform actions which merit an everlasting reward. It is an entirely supernatural and gratuitous gift. For this reason we cannot merit it, but we should continually pray for it because it is absolutely necessary if we are to do good and to merit Heaven. Our first ancestor, Adam, was endowed with this gift by our Creator. Unfortunately, by original sin he lost it for himself and for his descendants.

We cannot complain to God about this loss, since grace is an

entirely supernatural gift which is in no way due to our human nature. For the same reason we cannot merit it on our own. But God, being infinitely good as well as infinitely just, sent His only begotten Son to redeem us from sin and to grant us His friendship once more.

We should be very grateful to God for this extraordinary favour and should unite our efforts to the divine action of grace in the performance of good works which will enable us to merit everlasting life.

2. It is astonishing to consider how much St. Paul accomplished when he had been transformed by the grace of God. Formerly a persecutor of Christians, he became the Apostle of the Gentiles. Enlightened by faith and inspired by charity, he travelled the globe spreading everywhere the religion of Jesus Christ.

He feared neither the anger of the hostile Jews nor the tribunals of the Roman judges, neither long and difficult journeys nor scourging, shipwreck and imprisonment. *The love of Christ impels us,*¹ he said. It was the love of God which drove him on and on until he met his martyrdom. But what about ourselves? We also have received grace from God. Often we hear His voice appealing to us to abandon our sinful ways, to practise virtue, to love Him more ardently and to prove our love by deeds. If we co-operate, we shall be able to say with St. Paul: *by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been fruitless,*² and *I have labored . . . yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*³

It is wise to recall, however, that Judas also received special graces from God. He did not correspond with them and was probably damned for eternity. If we fail to correspond with God's graces, the result will be tragic for ourselves.

3. *Be not silent; Lord, be not far from me.*⁴

It is never really God Who is silent. He is forever appealing to us to lead good lives. He is never really far from us, but is

always ready to bestow His gifts on us. Even when we have sinned, we hear His voice prompting us to thoughts of remorse. Even when we stray away from Him, He follows and asks us to return to Him. It is we who must ensure that the noise of the world will not prevent us from hearing His fatherly appeal, and that sinful temptations will not destroy His influence over us.

Let us continually implore His graces because we are always in need of them. Let us use them well so that they will enable us to gain everlasting life.

¹ 2 Cor. 5, 14.

² 1 Cor. 15, 10.

³ 1 Cor. 15, 10.

⁴ Ps. 34, 22.

13th July

ACCEPTING THE WILL OF GOD

I. Why are we so often dissatisfied and so easily unsettled by ordinary events? Why does a small measure of success, pleasure, or human praise go to our heads and disturb our peace of soul? Why does suffering failure, or humiliation, make us sad and dispirited? It is because we forget that everything comes to us from God.

The inscrutable designs of Divine Providence have ordained that our mortal lives should be interwoven with joyful and sorrowful events. There is joy so that we may realise that God is infinitely good and may experience on earth the reflection of His beauty. There is sorrow so that we may remember that *here we have no permanent city, but we seek for the city that is to come.*¹ We should not be too elated by worldly pleasure and success, but should be grateful to God for giving them to us. On the other hand, we should not lose heart nor rebel when we experience suffering or humiliation. These also come from God and He has a reason for sending them to us. Even if we do not know the reason, we should retain our confidence that

the Providence of God arranges everything for our true welfare.

2. The Saints were always calm and peaceful, because they accepted everything from God and offered everything to Him. They thanked God for pleasure and for success; they thanked Him with equal sincerity for suffering and for injuries.

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*² Since we are in God's hands, we are in good hands. If it pleases God to send troubles to us this is a sign that they are good for us. If it pleases Him to humiliate us, it is a sign that we need to be humbled. If He causes us to suffer, it is a sign that we need to be purified from our sins and made more worthy of Him. In suffering and in joy may His holy will will be done.

3. Let us pray fervently to God for spiritual peace. Let us surrender ourselves to His will and accept everything from His hands, remembering that everything, joy and sorrow, sickness and health, temptation and spiritual consolation, should form a mystical ladder which will gradually bring us nearer to Heaven and finally unite us to God for evermore. Everything passes, but God is unchangeable.

Sufferings have to end, but the merit we gain remains if we have offered our afflictions to God. Let us surrender ourselves completely into the hands of God, Who in His goodness gives us some happiness on earth for our consolation and causes us to suffer so that we may be purified and made holy.

¹ Heb. 13, 14.

² Job 1, 21.

14th July

EVERLASTING SALVATION'

1. Let us consider again the man on the endless, and apparently aimless, journey into land after land. He walked for a long time through valleys and over mountains, in the heat

of the summer and in the sharp cold of the winter months. It made no difference to him whether the sun gave him encouragement or the rain and snow impeded him, he forged ahead just the same. He crossed rivers, floods, mountains and hillocks, and came down into the valleys again. But at last, when he had travelled for years, he felt himself tiring.

He turned around and saw another man looking at him with compassion in his eyes. He approached the stranger, who said to him: "My friend, you look tired. Have you been walking for a long time?" "For a very long time," he replied, "and I am very tired." "But where are you going?" the other man asked. "What is your destination?" The traveller sighed as if he had just awakened from a deep sleep and murmured: "Where am I going? I don't know! I have been walking for a long time, but I have no idea where I am going." At this his new friend stared even more pityingly at the traveller, eyeing him as if he were an unfortunate simpleton.

When we reflect a little, do we not feel that we are rather like this poor traveller? Our journey has lasted a good many hard and weary years. Have we seriously thought about where we are going? Have we solved the fundamental problem of our earthly journey—the goal and purpose of our lives? *What does it profit a man, Jesus has said to us, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹ Our eternal welfare is the great question which we should ponder continually.

2. More than anything else, it is necessary to look after our eternal salvation. In comparison with this, all other business is unimportant. Our personal salvation is the only thing which is absolutely essential in our lives. Let us meditate on this momentous fact, which has converted so many sinners and filled Heaven with Saints.

If I lose my soul, what use will money or success be to me? What good will be human learning or worldly pleasure? All

this will pass away, whereas only my good actions will weigh the balance of divine justice in my favour.

Let us think of our sins, which are unfortunately so numerous, and of our good actions, which are probably far fewer in number. It will be tragic for us if the weight of our sins should carry us towards damnation. It is still in our power to guard against this by leading lives of penance and sanctity. *Strive . . . by good works to make your calling and election sure.*²

3. We should not be discouraged because our salvation requires so many sacrifices on our part. Jesus warned us that it would have to be so. *How narrow the gate and close the way that leads to life.*³ *The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force.*⁴ *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*⁵ All this is required for salvation, and anyone who is not prepared to meet these demands cannot gain everlasting happiness. Nevertheless, there is no need for despondency. What is difficult for man is easy for God. If we ask God for His grace and co-operate generously with it, we shall be saved. Let us resolve to play our part well.

¹ Mt. 16, 26.

² 2 Peter 1, 10.

³ Mt. 7, 14.

⁴ Mt. 11, 12.

⁵ Luke 9, 23.

15th July

A LIFE OF FERVOUR

I. "To pray is to love," wrote St. Augustine. The man who loves God prays continually and with fervour, whereas the man who has little love for his Creator prays rarely and apathetically. Prayer does not consist primarily in verbal expression, but in the elevation of the mind to God in adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation, and supplication. Love should be the inspiration of

our communication with God, for where there is no love there can be no prayer.

Jesus tells us that we *must always pray and not lose heart*.¹ We may be working, walking, talking, eating or sleeping, but whatever we are doing, the love of God can transform it into a prayer. This is so if we are engaged in our work, but have offered it to God in advance. If we are in trouble, our sufferings will be pleasing to God. If we are walking about, everything will speak to us of God and cause us to make acts of gratitude and of love. We shall have dealings with men of the world, but they will perceive and appreciate that we are spiritually united to God. We shall sleep because sleep is necessary, but what appear to be hours of fruitless inactivity will be dedicated to our Creator. Fervour in prayer and in action should be the constant ideal of the good Christian, because it makes his entire life pleasing to God.

2. God is our Creator and absolute Master, Whom the Angels adore and irrational creatures obey. His greatness demands that we should offer all our activity to Him in a spirit of fervent and loving dedication. Since we have received everything from Him, we have many reasons for loving Him. By the work of redemption God became our friend and brother, and the victim of expiation for our sins. How could we remain indifferent and ungrateful when we remember the favours which we have received? Love desires love in return, and God loved us so much that He became man and shed His blood for us. Moreover, He immolates Himself continually on our behalf in the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. Finally, our fervour should be increased by the reflection that God has reserved for us as an everlasting reward His own Beatific Vision.

All these considerations should help to increase the fervour of our love. Then our actions will form a ladder of ascent to God by means of which we shall become intimately united to Him.

3. The fervent Christian will never miss an opportunity of

advancing in perfection. When he feels that he is growing negligent, he combats the signs of spiritual retrogression and makes a new beginning by telling God that he wishes to belong entirely to Him. It is his motto that no day must ever pass without a further step towards perfection. To decide to stand still is fatal, for it leads inevitably to a decline. It is true that the constant effort to advance costs great sacrifices, but sanctity cannot be achieved without sacrifice and everlasting happiness cannot be gained without perseverance in virtue. Moreover, difficult though the ascent towards perfection may be, it eases the heaviness of our hearts and brings us that fundamental peace which God alone can give.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

16th July

ENTRUSTING OURSELVES TO GOD

1. If a boat is running with the stream, it has little need of the pull of the oars nor of the guidance of the helm. Its passage is smooth and peaceful.

The same applies to those who place absolute confidence in God in their journey through life. God knows that I love Him, they reason; He knows the dangers to which I am exposed and knows how weak I am. He will not allow me to be tempted beyond my strength. *God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.*¹

Why should I worry when I know that whatever God has in store for me is for my own good? Do I suffer from poor health? Let the will of God be done, for this is for my spiritual welfare. Am I strong and able to work for His glory? Let me thank God for making me the instrument of His goodness.

Am I calumniated or misunderstood? This humiliation is good

for me. Am I esteemed and honoured? Let me accept this also from God's hands and make the best possible use of the gifts which He has given me, for my responsibility is all the greater because of them. It would be a sad loss if these gifts were to make me vain and proud, for they do not belong to me but to God. There is no need to be disturbed. Everything must be accomplished for God, with God and in God, and with complete abandonment to His will.

2. Sometimes the cross seems too heavy. Physical or mortal sufferings may give rise to a feeling of rebellion, or temptations may grow so strong that I feel overwhelmed and unable to experience the supernatural influence of God's grace

At such times I should remember the words of Jesus: *Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon You, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.*²

If I leave myself entirely in God's hands, my cross will become lighter. My worries and woes will be easier to bear, and I shall not be excessively elated by worldly pleasure.

3. All the Saints had this perfect trust in God. Therefore they were always content. St. Joseph is only one example. He had the joy of seeing the Son of God born of his immaculate spouse, but he also saw Him being born on a cold, dark night in the most squalid conditions. He heard the choir of Angels praising God above the lowly manger and saw the shepherds and the Magi adoring the Divine Child. But soon afterwards he heard from a heavenly messenger that Herod was seeking to put Jesus to death and that it would be necessary to flee into exile in Egypt.

The holy Patriarch was as resigned to the poverty of the manger and the discomforts of exile as he was grateful to God for the wonderful gifts and joys which he had been granted. He knew that God could have solved by a single act of His divine will all the problems which he encountered throughout life. But

he never asked for such a favour. His only desire was to do God's Will perfectly. Let this be our desire also, and let us never cease to ask God for this grace.

¹ Cor. 10, 13.

² Mt. 11, 28.

17th July

THE VOICE OF GOD

1. God speaks to us in many ways by means of created things. We see his glory in the stars of the firmament,¹ in the seas, mountains and valleys, and in the trees and flowers. St. Thérèse was once examining the petals of a flower when she exclaimed: "How good thou art, O God!"

God also speaks within us. Sometimes He sees how absorbed we are in worldly affairs and He stirs up in us a restlessness and a longing for Heaven. When we fall into sin, He pricks us with remorse and appeals to us to rise again, making us realise that everything else is empty and futile if we have lost Him. He speaks to us still more clearly by means of Revelation, which is contained in Sacred Scripture as officially interpreted by the Church.

The revealed Word of God has always been with us to answer the searchings of the human heart and to allay its anxieties. The Gospel is as new and as illuminating today as yesterday. It is a book which we should study reverently and diligently in order to solve our personal problems and the problems of mankind.

Let us listen to God when He speaks to us in these diverse ways. Let us respond to His appeals and carry out whatever He requires of us in our daily lives.

2. God also speaks to us through His Saints.

The Saints are men in whom God dwells in such a special way that their entire personalities reflect Him. They live the Gospel perfectly. They have renounced themselves in order to

belong completely to God. Not only have they overcome their evil inclinations, but they have conquered themselves in the process of that Christian annihilation which sublimates human nature rather than destroys it. They have enthroned God in the place of their own will and of their own ego, so that like St. Paul they can claim: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

God still speaks to us through His Saints, for even in this troubled and mechanical age there are pure and humble souls dedicated to God and the service of their fellow-men. Whenever we encounter one of these privileged beings, whether in the pages of a book or in our actual surroundings, let us pay attention to him and do our best to imitate his virtues.

3. It will go hard with the man who refuses to listen to God. He has reason to be afraid when he lets God's inspirations and graces pass him by. Anyone who is deaf to God's appeals cannot be saved.

God spoke many times in the heart of His apostle Judas, but he did not listen. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Judas betrayed his Master with a kiss, Jesus spoke to him and called him His friend, giving him the kiss of peace and forgiveness. But the traitor spurned this last appeal and went his way. May this never be our fate. *Be not silent*, let us plead. *Lord, be not far from me!*² Above all, let us listen obediently to His voice from whatever source it comes, and let us do what He advises us.

¹ Cf. Ps. 13, 2.

² Ps. 34, 22.

18th July

OUR PASSIONS

1. Our passions are not essentially sinful. They can open the way to evil, but they can also lead us towards perfection. Everything depends on how we control and direct them. They are

impulses which are at the same time valuable and dangerous.

Human nature was wounded as a result of original sin. The soul was disobedient to God, and the lower faculties rebelled against right reason. Hence the disturbance of our passions. What should our attitude be in regard to this problem? Should we suppress or obliterate our passions, as some of the Stoics would have done? It is, in fact, impossible to do this, for our passions are innate natural forces which cannot be destroyed. What we should do is guide and control them. If the dykes are burst, a strongly flowing river can cause havoc, but if its course is wisely directed it irrigates the soil and makes it fertile. It is the same with our natural inclinations, which "can be used to form a saint, but can also make a brigand."¹

A man with a fiery and aggressive temperament can use his natural impulses under God's guidance to combat vice in himself and in others. One who is haughty and ambitious by nature can convert his ambition into a quest for the true and lasting glory of Heaven. Finally, a passionate man who feels the need to love and to be loved can find a partial remedy in Christian friendship. Most of all, however, he can find repose in the love of God.

2. It is a hard thing to control and to direct our natural inclinations. It requires perseverance, sacrifice, and the grace of God, for which we should always pray.

Often this struggle will last a lifetime, and we can still fall even after many years of combat. It is important, however, never to give up. If a man accepts defeat and quietly submits to the tyranny of sinful passion, he is lost for ever. It is a poor outlook also for a Christian who ends up by being satisfied with a life of worthless mediocrity. We must fight hard, pray fervently, and value nothing higher than the love of Christ. When we are finally victorious, our joy will be greater than any happiness which the world can give.

3. Let us be vigilant in the control of our passions. As soon as they tempt us to do anything contrary to right reason and

the divine law, let us renew our resolutions and implore the help of God. "O God," let us pray, "I wish to love You above all things. I wish neither to contemplate nor intend nor do anything which could offend You in any way." This is the only way in which we shall find peace and an easy conscience for, as *The Imitation of Christ* says, "whenever a man desireth any thing inordinately, straightaway he is disquieted within himself."² "It is by resisting the passions," it continues, "and not by serving them, that true peace of heart is to be found."³

¹ Cordovani, *Breviario Spirituale*, p. 66.

² *Imit. of Christ*, Bk. I, c. 6.

³ *Imit. of Christ*, Bk. I, c. 6.

19th July

OUR DOMINANT PASSION

I. Among the passions which disturb us, there is one predominant tendency which is our particular weakness. Perhaps we are not aware what it is, but those who have to live with us know it well. It is essential for us to know it also in order to make it a special objective in our spiritual combat.

This information may be obtained by praying earnestly to the Holy Spirit to enlighten us to know ourselves, by making a daily examination of conscience, and by seeking the advice of our confessor, of our spiritual director, and of any sincere friend. It is our predominant passion which most often leads us into sin. It recurs in all our confessions and we have great difficulty in overcoming it. The predominant passion of Cain was envy, which he failed to combat in time, so that eventually it caused him to commit fratricide. Lust was the predominant passion of Mary Magdalen and of St. Augustine and until they managed to control it, it led them into many grave errors. It was because the Apostle Judas neglected to struggle against his own avarice

that he became a traitor. There are others who are inordinately proud and ambitious, and still others who are governed by a craving for pleasure.

What is your predominant passion? You must know what it is in order to combat it determinedly, for otherwise it will lead you into one sin after another until you are eternally ruined.

2. Holy and God-fearing people know their own particular weakness. They accept it as a cross and will not rest until they have conquered it with God's help. The battle cannot be won in a day, but in most cases takes a great many years. Often the ultimate victory is not gained until the hour of death.

It has been said that self-love dies three days after ourselves. We are enormously attached to our own ego, and humility is a very difficult virtue to acquire. Sometimes we have struggled for years to gain it and, quite suddenly, we meet with another disastrous fall. It would be easy to be overcome by discouragement at this stage, but this should not be allowed to happen. When we fall we should say to God in our repentance: "It is good for me to be humbled." To ourselves we should say immediately: "Let us begin all over again!"

St. Francis de Sales was endowed by nature with a sharp and hasty temperament, against which he fought for many years with great determination and reliance on God's help. Finally, he conquered and came to be regarded as an angel of peace. Nevertheless, even in the later years of his life, he still experienced inward tendencies towards anger, so that his exterior gentleness was really a supreme act of virtue.

3. We can conquer our predominant passion by the following means:

(a) Fervent prayer.

(b) A daily examination of conscience, in the course of which we shall discover whether we have made any progress in the way of perfection, and shall renew our good resolutions.

- (c) Weekly or at least fortnightly confession.
- (d) Daily or at least frequent communion.
- (e) Avoidance of the occasions of sin and employment of the necessary means to overcome sin.
- (f) The performance of good actions which are opposed to our predominant passion.
- (g) Determination to fight and to conquer, because we are convinced that it is absolutely necessary to do so.

There can be no half-measures, for the only alternative to victory is defeat. If we are conquered, we shall be slaves of passion in this life and shall be everlastingly unhappy in the next.

20th July

NATURE AND GRACE

I. "Observe diligently the motions of nature and grace," says the Imitation of Christ, "for they move with great contrariety and subtlety, and can hardly be distinguished but by a spiritual man, and one that is inwardly enlightened."¹

The struggle between fallen nature and grace is due to original sin, which extinguished in us the supernatural life and gave rise to the disharmony which exists between our lower faculties and reason, and between reason and God. Even the Saints experienced this fearful internal battle between good and evil. *I see another law in my members*, says St. Paul, *warring against the law of my mind.*² Elsewhere he complains that *the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,*³ and that the temptations of the flesh assailed him so strongly that he pleaded with God to save him. But God's reply to his entreaties was: *My grace is sufficient for thee, for strength is made perfect in weakness.*⁴

This does not mean that human nature is substantially corrupt and incapable of doing good as a result of sin. The inclination

towards goodness and towards God remains and is very strong in our better moments. Nevertheless, we need the helping hand of God so that this inclination may express itself in good actions worthy of an everlasting reward. For this reason we should pray humbly and constantly for the precious gift of divine grace.

2. Two extremes must be avoided in the relationship between nature and grace. The first is that of the rigorists who see in human nature nothing but confusion and the propensity towards evil, and therefore advocate an iron domination completely lacking in any understanding of human frailty. They believe that perfection must be achieved swiftly by means of the most ferocious privations and penances. This excessively severe approach to the spiritual life can lead to discouragement and eventual collapse. The way of perfection is an ascending ladder which must be climbed step by step. Falls must be expected, but it is necessary to rise again at once with renewed courage, knowing that when we reach the top we shall find rest and peace.

The other extreme is an attitude of superficial ease. There is no emphasis on the necessity of grace, nor on the need for prayer and faithful co-operation with God's grace in order to perform good works. Instead there is a kind of natural decency and lukewarm virtue which ignores the necessity for mortification and the spirit of sacrifice. Anyone who sets out on this path can never be a fervent and active Christian.

3. Even though there is a contrast between grace and nature there is also a certain harmony, because God made us for Himself, as St. Augustine says, and our hearts will never be at rest until they rest in Him. Grace is a supernatural graft which elevates our nature and makes it capable of attaining everlasting life. It is necessary to take away all the shoots of the old tree-stump and to care for the new branches. Only then shall we begin to approach Christian perfection.

“Therefore, O Lord, let thy grace always go before and follow

me, and make me ever intent upon good works, through Jesus Christ Thy Son. Amen.”⁵

¹ Imit. of Christ, Bk. III, c. 54.

² Rom. 7, 23.

³ Gal. 5, 17.

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 12, 7-9.

⁵ Imit. of Christ, Bk. III, c. 55.

21st July

THE ROYAL ROAD OF THE CROSS

1. The way of the Cross is the only road which leads to Heaven. Consequently, a man who refuses to take this road cannot reach Heaven. If there were another way, Jesus would have told us about it. Instead, He insisted that if anyone wished to go after Him, he would have to deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Him.¹

Our Lord did more than preach this way to us, for He gave us an example of the manner in which to follow it. Jesus could have redeemed us by a single act of His human-divine will, simply by offering Himself to the Eternal Father in expiation of our sins. But He chose to carry the weight of the Cross, to climb the Hill of Calvary, and to die in agony.

We must ascend our own Calvary if we wish to imitate and follow Jesus. Our divine Redeemer fulfilled perfectly in His Passion all the works of perfection which He had preached in the Gospel. Let the Passion of Christ be our rule of life. Let us be glad when we seem to be more like Him and sorrowful whenever we seem to be departing from the example which He set us.

Suffering should be a source of consolation for us, for it makes us more like Jesus as long as we endure it with resignation and with love.

2. We all have our own cross. When we reject it, we fashion one for ourselves by our defects and sins, which leave us discontented and restless, and draw God's punishment upon us.

It is useless to flee from the Cross, for it follows us everywhere. If we refuse to accept the cross which God has given us, we

take upon ourselves one which is heavier than the first. Worldlings can bask for a moment in their pleasure, but it soon passes and is replaced by bitterness and sorrow. Their suffering is deeper than that of a good Christian who places his trust in God. There is only one way of making our cross easier to bear and that is to embrace it as Jesus did. We should love the Cross because it is suffering which shows us how to become like Jesus, to make reparation for our sins, and to co-operate by our own passion with the Passion of Christ.²

3. A penitent once asked a holy priest for a hair-shirt. "I can't give you that," the priest replied, "but the best thing you can do is to offer to God the trials of your daily life." The penitent's reaction was to protest that he would find this too difficult.

As a matter of fact, it is very difficult. But it is useless for a man to wear a hair-shirt and to scourge himself if he is not prepared to put up with ordinary everyday hardships and to deny himself by carrying his cross with resignation and love. God has imposed certain penances on us all and these are necessary for us. To accept them is to set out on the royal road of the Cross which leads to Heaven.

It is true, however, that there are times when we meet with temptations which are exceptionally strong. It can be necessary on these occasions to impose extra penances on ourselves, for *it is better to enter life maimed or lame, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.*³ Nevertheless, the first and most necessary penance is to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus.

¹ Luke 9, 23.

² Cf. 1 Col. 1, 24.

³ Cf. Mt. 18, 8.

22nd July

HOLINESS

1. In a radio message which he broadcast on the occasion of the Beatification of Pope Innocent XI, the Supreme Pontiff,

Pius XII, defined holiness as "the intimate awareness of loyal subjection to God, Who is adored and loved as the beginning, end, and norm of every thought, affection, word, and action."

Let us meditate on this definition, which helps to shed some light on the true nature of sanctity. A holy man must always have a keen awareness of his own dependence upon God, his Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, and his hoped for reward and happiness in the next life. This awareness must be vivid, for it should not be possible for it to be obscured by worldly distractions or obliterated by sensual allurements. It should be active, so that it may not be a merely theoretical acknowledgment of our dependence which leads to nothing more than lip-worship; on the contrary, it must be capable of transforming our lives into an act of obedience and of love. Finally, it should be a faithful awareness, a complete and voluntary subjection to God which is the driving force behind all our words and actions, and which inspires us alike in joy and in sorrow, in victory and in defeat. If we wish to be perfect Christians, we must cultivate this kind of consciousness of our dependence upon God.

2. It is not true to say that holiness can be attained only by a few select souls, so that ordinary goodness is sufficient for people like ourselves who have so many other things to think about and to do. Such an attitude leads to tepidity, from which it is a short and easy step to sin itself. Anyway, there is no such thing as mediocre virtue, for if virtue is not aiming at perfection it is not genuine. A sincere Christian cannot be satisfied with mediocrity, for he is obliged to be holy, or at least to fight hard with the help of God's grace to become holy.

Even in the Old Testament we read: *I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy.*¹ This exhortation is repeated by St. Peter in his first Epistle,² and in the Gospel Jesus Himself commands us to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect.³ Holiness, then, is a goal towards which all sincere Christians must strive.

3. We need Saints to recall our wayward and corrupt society to the paths of truth, justice and charity. We should pray to God to send us Saints who will reform the world by living the Gospel and making it live for others. Above all, we should endeavour to become holy ourselves. To achieve this we do not have to put on sack-cloth, go into the desert, or shut ourselves up in a monastery. Each of us can become a saint in his own home and in whatever position God has allotted him. All we have to do is obey God's Will in everything, love Him above everything, love our neighbour as ourselves, avoid sin and aim at what is good. We can and should do all this with the help of God.

¹ Lev. 11, 44; 19, 2.

² 1 Peter 1, 15-16.

³ Mt. 5, 48.

23rd July

KNOWLEDGE AND SANCTITY

1. If there had been equal progress throughout the ages in sanctity and in science, men would now be very wise and very holy.

It is a well-known fact that science has made great strides, but it must be admitted, unfortunately, that it has often forgotten its beginning and final end, which is God alone. The object of knowledge is truth, and all truth comes from God, but it dwells in created things like a reflection of divine light. We must trace this reflected light back to its original source. If students had always done this, they could have become wise as well as learned. They would have gained from their studies and research a deeper knowledge of God, the author of all the marvels in the universe, and they would have discovered how to worship and obey Him.

When science goes astray or becomes an end in itself, it ceases

to be of real service and can become an instrument of evil. When the history of philosophy was described as the history of human aberrations, this was not altogether an exaggeration. Moreover, the technical and practical sciences which are flourishing in this era have often become the means of human destruction. This is what happens when science turns away from God, Who is its origin.

There is a great deal of learning in the modern world, but very little holiness. As a result of their absorption in intellectual labour and scientific research, men have forgotten the most important thing in life, which is goodness.

It would seem that the intellect has stifled the impulses of the heart and the dictates of conscience. Do not let this happen in your own case. By all means, have and promote learning, but more than anything else cultivate in your soul that sanctity which will be your greatest treasure in life.

2. We have no right to speak evil of human learning and industry, which are always a gift from God. But we must recognise that goodness is more important than knowledge. The devil's intellect is superior to ours, but he has lost God and in losing God has lost everything which is good.

Knowledge puffs up,¹ writes St. Paul. Pride and presumption can easily spring from a little learning, whereas the fruits of holiness are always beneficial to ourselves and to others.

Let us be humble in our scientific studies and use the results which we obtain for our own progress in sanctity.

3. Padre Cordovani has described the proper progress of the intellect in the following way.

(1) First of all, it studies the things which it knows and mysteriously enriches itself.

(2) It rises from this abundance of knowledge to a keener sense of responsibility in life, until it achieves a Christian harmony. At this stage we have faith, meditation and Christian formation.

(3) Meditation cannot afford to become enclosed within itself, but goes on to become inflamed with love until it develops into contemplation. Now we have the contemplative, who can be a monk, a scientist, or a politician.

(4) If everything goes well, the contemplative abandons his state of solitude and goes in search of souls in the manner of the Saints and of our Divine Master. Otherwise, the contemplative can become a quietist.²

We should try and follow this course in our studies, whether they are sacred or profane. If we do so, we shall achieve personal sanctity and shall engage ourselves in apostolic work for others.

¹ 1 Cor. 8, 1.

² Breviario Spirituale, p. 129.

24th July

PROGRESS IN THE LOVE OF GOD

1. The entire Christian system is based on the love of God. This is *the greatest and first commandment*¹ of Jesus, from which the second commandment to love our neighbour naturally flows. A man who does not observe this first commandment is not a Christian, whereas a man who endeavours to increase every day his love for God is a saint. There are many grades of ascent in this love, but the basic step is indicated in the words of our Divine Master: *He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.*²

The love of God should not consist of an empty and uneffective sentimentality, but should comprise a sincere determination to please God by carrying out His will without reserve and by becoming more closely united to Him by the help of His holy grace. Progress in the love of God is divided by the masters of the spiritual life into three stages:—(1) the period of purification;

(2) the period of illumination; and (3) the period of union with God. We may have advanced no farther than the first stage because there is still so much to be purified in our souls. Nevertheless, let us ask God's grace to help us to begin this work immediately.

2. They are in the first grade of perfection in the love of God who desire to love Him but still feel an attachment to sin. How is it possible to love God and at the same time to offend Him by yielding to unlawful desires and to the attractions of the world? This is a mystery of the human heart, which can experience simultaneously the desire to love God and the disturbances of the flesh.

People like this must humbly persevere in praying for the grace which they need. They must eradicate their major vices one by one so that they may be free to love God. Since their course will be difficult and full of obstacles, they will need the courage of mountaineers, but, far above, the white and sun-kissed summit awaits them. Only toil and sacrifice can bring them there, but when they arrive they will know real happiness, for they will see God. *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*³

3. The second stage is one of illumination and increase in perfection. When the soul has been set free from sin, it must be enriched by all the virtues.

The love of God demands that we should never stand still. If we sincerely love God, we must please Him in every way. Under the influence of His grace, therefore, we must ascend step by step towards the perfection which Jesus requires of us,⁴ until we reach the third stage, which is union with God. We shall be blessed with happiness if we can reach this peak, for we shall look upon the joys and sorrows of this world with a tranquil gaze. Our whole being will go out to God in an act of complete surrender. Like St. Paul, we shall no longer be ourselves, but shall belong wholly to God. Let us be fervent and

energetic in striving to reach this summit of perfection, which is a foretaste of Heaven itself.

¹ Mt. 22, 38.

² John 14, 15 & 21.

³ Mt. 5, 8.

⁴ Mt. 5, 48.

25th July

PURIFICATION

1. We must recognise that we are all poor sinners in the sight of God.

Sacred Scripture warns us that *the just man falls seven times*.¹ *If we say that we have no sin*, says St. John, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.² Sin is the greatest evil because it offends God, our highest good and happiness. It only needs our own malice for us to commit sin, but in order to make reparation for it and to redeem us from slavery it was necessary for God to become man and to offer Himself as a victim of expiation for our sins. Only a God-Man could have fully satisfied our debt by offering Himself as a victim of reparation for His adopted brothers.

Jesus desires us to be associated with Him in His Passion, however.³ Our justification cannot be something extrinsic to ourselves, but should transform us and make us holy. Our co-operation with divine grace is necessary for this purpose.⁴ If we are in sin we should not only repent, but should purify ourselves by acts of penance. Jesus Himself commands this. *Unless you repent, you will all perish*.⁵ *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*.⁶

We must make satisfaction for our sins, therefore, by voluntary co-operation with the grace of God. Although God is infinitely good and merciful, He will not purify us without this co-operation on our part. We can be purified by accepting the unavoidable tribulations of life with perfect resignation and by offering to God our own voluntary mortifications and sacrifices.

Are we prepared to follow the example of the Saints in this matter?

2. God has given us two supernatural means of purifying

ourselves after we have sinned—the Sacrament of Penance and Indulgences. The Sacrament of Penance is the plank of salvation to which we can cling when we have been shipwrecked by sin, and by means of Indulgences we can draw on the infinite treasury of the merits of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Saints in order to make partial or total satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to our sins. In this way we can shorten our purgatory in this life and escape it in the next.

We should make good use of the Sacrament of Penance. If we fall into mortal sin, let us have recourse at once to this fount of grace. Even when we are not in mortal sin, let us be faithful to the practice of weekly or at least fortnightly Confession.

We should not abuse this great gift simply because it seems such a simple method of obtaining pardon. God is infinitely just, we must remember, and He expects us to co-operate with His graces.

3. We should also value Indulgences as a means of spiritual purification. They ought not to be treated lightly. Jesus gave His Church the power of loosing and binding every bond of sin. As long as we have the necessary dispositions, therefore, it can draw on the merits of Christ and of the Saints to release us from the temporal punishment due to the sins which have already been forgiven us. It achieves this by the concession of Indulgences. These require on our part the fulfilment of certain conditions, a sincere sorrow for sin, and a strong resolution never to offend God again.

¹ Prov. 24, 16.

² 1 John 1, 8.

³ Cf. Col. 1, 24.

⁴ 1 Cor. 15, 10.

⁵ Luke 13, 5.

⁶ Mt. 3, 2. 4, 17.

26th July

ADORATION OF JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

I. Anyone who loves Jesus sincerely in the Sacrament of the Eucharist must experience a pang of regret whenever he enters

a church and sees that the spaces surrounding the tabernacle are empty. Here and there a few people may be praying before statues of Our Lady and of the Saints, but too often there is nobody to worship Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Only the dim light of the tabernacle lamp seems to be attempting to compensate in some small way for the ingratitude of men. Yet here is no mere image, but the real living Jesus Who loves us and longs to shower His gifts upon us.

We are poor, and He is rich; we are weak, and He is strong. We are sinners and He wishes us to kneel repentant at His feet so that He may forgive us. We are bent beneath the weight of our cross which seems too heavy for us to bear, and He desires to lighten it by His grace. We are weary and worried and unable to find a friend who will fully understand and comfort us. But if we go to Jesus we shall find a Friend and Comforter. *Come to me, He says to us, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.*¹ Let us kneel before Jesus in the tabernacle and confide to Him our worries, sorrows and desires. He will understand and enlighten us; He will strengthen our wavering resolution and inspire in our hearts the divine love which makes it easy to sacrifice ourselves for His sake.

2. In many dioceses and parishes there exist associations of devout people who take it in turns to pray before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. There ought to be some such association everywhere, because everyone who has a sincere love for the Holy Eucharist should feel the need of spending some time in adoration and in conversation with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Saints often spent days and nights in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. What about you? Even if you are not members of an Eucharistic association, you should put aside some time every day for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. There you will find the strength to put your good resolutions

into effect. You will find consolation in your troubles and rest for your soul.

3. Life to-day is fast and mechanical, a mad race for profit and pleasure. Cars speed along the roads; the footpaths are paced by people with anxious faces; theatres, cinemas and sports grounds are crowded with people searching for the illusion of happiness. But what of the churches? Apart from a few hours on Sundays, they are usually almost completely deserted.

Nevertheless, the churches are the only places where peace is to be found, for in each is the home of Jesus, really present and on fire with love for men.

Let us go and kneel before the tabernacle. Let us pray for ourselves, for our forgetful and ungrateful brothers who are plunged in sin, who have lost the light of faith and the purifying flame of love. Let us offer ourselves as living lamps of sacrifice for the salvation of our fellow-men and for the triumph of the Church.

¹ Mt. II, 28-30.

27th July

THE HOUR OF TRIAL

1. Everybody, even a Saint, has his hour of trial. God wants it this way, so that if we are victorious with the help of His grace, we can receive our reward. *One who enters a contest is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules.*¹ Even the Angels were put on trial, and those haughty spirits who rebelled against God were damned for ever.

Our first parents were placed on trial and because they disobeyed God's command were deprived of their supernatural gifts and exiled from their earthly paradise. Even Jesus willed to endure His hour of trial in the Garden of Gethsemane, before

the Sanhedrin, before the judgment seat of Pilate, and on Mount Calvary. He desired to be tried in this way in order to teach us how to be victorious.

Our trials are of various kinds, some of which recur frequently during our lives. They may be physical, such as suffering, disease, disgrace or poverty. They may be moral trials which affect mainly the heart—the neglect of those whom we love, calumny, misunderstanding, or malice. There are also spiritual trials such as discouraging lapses into sin, or aridity of soul when it seems that the Heavenly Father has abandoned us as He abandoned Jesus in His last agony on the Cross.

How should we behave when we are tried? Jesus showed us the way when He took upon Himself the sins of all mankind and His passion began in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even before He ascended Mount Calvary and was nailed to the Cross, He experienced here all the agony and terror of His redemptive mission. Prostrate with suffering, He prayed three times: *Father, if it is possible let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as thou willest.*² When we are tried, we should fervently repeat this prayer of complete resignation to the will of God.

2. Whether they are physical, moral or spiritual, these severe trials affect us greatly. We feel crushed and abandoned, lacking in the power to resist, and tend to yield to temptation or to despair. At these times we should take the Crucifix in our hands and remember the sufferings of Jesus. Let us recall His terrible physical sufferings as He was dying upon the Cross. Let us remember the sufferings of His Heart when He was betrayed by Judas, deserted by the Apostles, and rejected by His own people. Finally, let us recall His spiritual sufferings, for He who was innocence itself willed to carry the weight of all our sins and to experience in a mysterious manner the sense of abandonment by His heavenly Father.

No matter what our trial may be, let us ask Jesus for the grace of resignation and of Christian hope.

3. We should meditate on the following passage from the *Imitation of Christ*:

“O just Father, holy, and ever to be praised, the hour is come for Thy servant to be tried. O Father worthy of all love, it is fitting that Thy servant should at this hour suffer something for Thee. O Father always to be honoured, the hour is come which from all eternity Thou didst foresee would arrive; that Thy servant for a short itme should be oppressed exteriorly, but interiorly should ever live unto Thee; that he should be for a little slighted and humbled, and should fail in the sight of men; that he should be severely afflicted with sufferings and languors, that so he may rise again with Thee in the dawning of a new light and be glorified in heaven.

“O holy Father, Thou hast so appointed and such is Thy will; and that has come to pass which Thou hast ordained. For this is a favour to Thy friend, that he should suffer and be afflicted in this world for the love of Thee . . . It is good for me, O Lord, that Thou hast humbled me . . .

“Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know; to love what I ought to love; to praise that which is most pleasing to Thee; to esteem that which appeareth to Thee valuable; to abhor that which is filthy in Thy sight.”³

In the light of these reflections every trial will be bearable and, by the grace of God, even welcome.

¹ Cf. 2 Tim. 2, 5.

² Cf. Mt. 26, 39-42.

³ Bk. III, c. 50.

28th July

TEMPTATIONS

1. When a man fears and loves God, temptation is the greatest trial which he can endure.

“No one is so perfect and holy,” says the *Imitation of Christ*,

“as not sometimes to have temptations; and we never can be wholly free from them. Nevertheless, temptations are often very profitable to a man, troublesome and grievous though they may be; for in them a man is humbled, purified and instructed. All the Saints passed through many tribulations and temptations, and profited by them. And they that could not support temptations became reprobate, and fell away . . .

“A man is never wholly secure from temptation as long as he liveth; for there is within us the source of temptation, since we were born in concupiscence . . .

“Inconstancy of mind, and little confidence in God, is the beginning of all evil temptations. For as a ship without a helm is driven to and fro by the waves, so the man who is negligent, and giveth up his resolution, is tempted in various ways. Fire trieth iron, and temptation a just man.”¹

These words from *The Imitation of Christ* should encourage us. God sends us temptations in order to test our virtue and to make us understand that we are in continual need of Him. The important thing is to overcome them with the help of His grace, for a thousand temptations do not constitute a single sin. When we are prepared to make sacrifices and to rely upon God’s assistance, temptations can be a source of merit for us.

*Blessed is the man who endures temptations, writes St. James, for when he has been tried, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.*²

We should not fear temptations nor be discouraged by them. Instead, we should watch and pray, and love God.

2. “Still we must watch,” *The Imitation of Christ* continues, “especially in the beginning of temptation, for then the enemy is more easily overcome, if he be not suffered to enter the door of the mind, but is withstood upon the threshold the very moment that he knocketh. Whence a certain one hath said: ‘Resist beginning; all too late the cure, when ills have gathered strength by long delay.’³ For first there cometh into the mind

a simple thought; then a strong imagination; afterwards delight, and the evil motion and consent."⁴

It is worth meditating on this vivid description of the psychology of temptation and of the simplest remedy by which it can be combated. Every temptation is first presented to the mind as a simple thought. If a man is determined enough it is quite easy to reject it immediately. If there is any delay, however, the concept is clothed by the imagination and projected in vivid colours until it arouses the evil inclinations of the senses. In this way the idea takes possession of the mind, so that it is almost impossible to set it free.

We must be ready to face up to such an idea before it takes possession of us. We should treat it as we would a serpent, not pausing to examine it, but taking to flight at once. If we are resolute, the grace of God will ensure our safety.

3. Why does God allow us to endure temptations? According to spiritual writers, there are two main reasons.

(1) Because God wishes us to be humble and not to depend too much on ourselves. Before he was tempted, St. Peter boasted that he would never deny his Master. When he was tempted, he fell, and recognised his weakness.

(2) Because by resisting temptation we can show our love for Jesus and our readiness to sacrifice everything for Him.

Temptations, therefore, can teach us humility and can help us to store up merit for our souls.

¹ Imit. of Christ, Bk. I, c. 13.

² James I, 12.

³ Ovid, Remed. Amor., V. 91.

⁴ Imit. of Christ, Bk. I, c. 13.

29th July

THE MAIN WAY TO CONQUER TEMPTATION

1. God never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength, but will always give us the grace which we need in order to

resist. *God is faithful, St. Paul writes, and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will always give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.*¹

The man who is so discouraged by frequent falls that he surrenders to temptation and resigns himself to the slavery of sin as if there were no other way out, is making a fatal mistake. God is infinitely good and merciful and loves us all, even those who are sinners. Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son and of the lost sheep. How could our heavenly Father abandon us and not give us the strength to resist evil?

If we are discouraged, let us ask God's help, for He loves us and knows how weak we are. *He knows how we are formed.*² It is a favourite trick of the devil to persuade us that nothing can help us. Let us cast aside all thoughts of discouragement, therefore, and arm ourselves with the necessary spiritual weapons. With humility, perseverance, and the grace of God, we are sure to triumph.

2. The masters of the spiritual life suggest various ways of combating temptation. As St. Alphonsus de' Liguori points out, however, "the first way is absolutely essential, and that is to pray to God for the light and strength to conquer. Without prayer it is impossible to overcome temptation, whereas with prayer we are sure of victory."³

The reason is obvious. Prayer is not simply a verbal address to Almighty God, but is an elevation of the mind and heart, a conversation with God. Let us pray, therefore, with confidence and with love.

3. Jesus Himself commands us to do this. *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*⁴ Temptation against chastity in particular can only be conquered by prayer. There must be no hesitation, but an immediate recourse to God as soon as the temptation is experienced.

"Slay the enemy while it is small,"⁵ recommends St. Jerome. When a lion is small, it is easily killed, but if we wait for it to grow

up, it will be more likely to kill us instead. It is the same with temptation. St. Francis de Sales tells us that we should imitate the little children who fly to the arms of their father and mother as soon as they spy a wolf. We should fly to Jesus and Mary for protection.

As long as temptation lasts we should persevere in prayer.

¹ Cor. 10, 13.

² Ps. 102, 14.

³ Al Servizio Divino, p. 11, c. VI.

⁴ Mt. 26, 41.

⁵ Ep. 22 ad Eust.

30th July

OTHER WAYS OF RESISTING TEMPTATION

I. After prayer, humility is the best weapon in our struggle against temptation.

God wishes us to realise that we are incapable of a single good thought or action without His assistance. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*¹ *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*² We cannot conquer temptation without the grace of God, and God only gives His grace to the humble. He allows us to be troubled by temptation in order to humble us, and if He perceives that we are still proud He allows us to fall by denying us His grace. Many of our falls, especially sins of impurity, are the result of pride.

Let us be humble, therefore, and recognise our own nothingness. At the same time, let us have complete confidence in God. *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.*³ We must be humble not only in the sight of God, but also in the presence of men. *What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?*⁴ Pride and ambition are links in a chain which secures us in the bondage of sin.

2. The third method is to avoid the occasions of sin. Anyone who places himself without grave reasons in the proximate occasion of sin is certain to fall. *He who loves danger*, the Holy Spirit warns us, *will perish in it*.⁵ It is useless for a man to pray when he is exposing himself needlessly and voluntarily to the danger of sinning. He cannot expect God to hear his prayers, for this is presumption, not confidence in God.

On the other hand a man may be obliged to expose himself to the risk of temptation in the course of his job or for some other strong reason. In this case, he can be sure of God's assistance, but he should fortify himself by fervent prayer and by taking all the precautions necessary to minimise the danger. Where temptations against holy purity are involved, it is especially necessary to avoid even the slightest occasion of sin when that is possible. As St. Francis de Sales was accustomed to say, there are certain battles which can only be won by soldiers who are prepared to retreat.

3. Very often it is impossible to flee from temptation, and there is no alternative but to face up to it.

We cannot face up to every kind of temptation in precisely the same manner. Pride, for example, may be assailed not merely by thinking about our own weakness, but also by performing acts of humility. We can counter irritability by remaining silent and by behaving gently and patiently. We can quench the desire for revenge by doing good to our enemies. In short, we can combat each temptation by performing good actions opposed to the vice towards which we are being drawn.

There are certain temptations, however, which it is wiser not to confront directly. If we allow ourselves to come face to face with impure thoughts and suggestions, for example, our senses are further aroused and the battle becomes harder than ever. God's grace should be implored from the outset and our good resolutions should be renewed. Then we should direct our attention to other thoughts and pursuits which are capable of

holding our interest. If the temptations are particularly violent, voluntary mortification may be helpful and even necessary.

Once we have triumphed, we shall be rewarded with spiritual peace.

¹ 2 Cor. 3, 5.

² James 4, 6; 1 Peter 5, 5.

³ Phil. 4, 13.

⁴ 1 Cor. 4, 7.

⁵ Ecclus. 3, 27.

31st July

LITTLE THINGS

I. Very few people are destined to great things by Almighty God. Most of us must offer ourselves in the relatively unimportant walks of life in which we have been placed by Providence. Only some of the Saints were endowed with exceptional virtues and miraculous powers which attracted the attention and admiration of the world. In the normal course of events Christian perfection must be acquired little by little through the practice of ordinary virtues and unspectacular good actions. There is always scope for these. An upsurge of anger can be suppressed from the motive of the love of God and of our neighbour. We can behave courteously towards people who are unsympathetic towards us or who offend us by their unmannerly conduct. We can combat pride by acts of humility and egoism by acts of charity. We can mortify ourselves in speech, in behaviour, and at table, and we can give alms to the poor, good advice to the ignorant, and comfort to the afflicted.

All these virtuous actions are insignificant in the eyes of men, but they are great in the sight of God. The blades of grass and the flowers in the meadow are tiny things, but joined together they constitute the pasture which provides nourishment for the herds and flocks. Let us perform these small actions every day and so cultivate the ordinary virtues. We shall attract the attention

and favour of God, Who will help us to advance step by step towards the peak of Christian perfection.

2. Just as there are very ordinary acts of virtue, so there are very ordinary sins. But it would be rash to regard acts of deception, vanity and impatience as insignificant. Every deliberate sin is an offence against God, our highest good and our Redeemer.

How can God be indifferent to these ungrateful violations of His law? After all, even as He has assured us that a cup of cold water given in His name to a thirsty man will have its reward,¹ so He has assured us that not even the slightest trace of sin can enter into eternal glory. We shall not be condemned to Hell for venial sins alone, but we shall suffer a decline in grace and shall be obliged to expiate our sins either in this life or in Purgatory.

3. Our eternal salvation will probably be determined by these ordinary acts of virtue and these ordinary sins. Jesus compared the kingdom of Heaven to a mustard-seed which grows into a tree. Similarly, many Saints began their spiritual ascent by following up one simple inspiration, and many souls, perhaps, have found themselves condemned as a result of having neglected the commonplace virtues and inspirations.

Ordinary virtue may develop into heroic virtue, but if a man has neglected to train himself to act well in small matters, how will he behave in a time of great spiritual trial? Experience also teaches us that smaller vices can develop into great vices. *He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare.*² A man who is not faithful to God in little things will not be faithful in greater things. We are either going up or down in the way of perfection; it is almost impossible to stand still. If we sincerely wish to make progress, let us resolve to avoid the least suggestion of sin and to enrich ourselves daily by tiny acts of virtue.

¹ Cf. Mt. 10, 42.

² Ecclus. 19, 1.

AUGUST

1st August

THE AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The cultivation of a continual awareness of the presence of God is such a useful practice that many writers regard it as the fundamental principle of the spiritual life. As St. Alphonsus de' Liguori points out, it obliges us to do three things: (1) To preserve ourselves completely free from sin; (2) To practise virtue in every possible way, and (3) To seek a closer and more loving contact with God.¹

The realisation of the presence of God is a particularly good way of subduing our passions and conquering temptation. "If we were always aware of God's presence within us," writes St. Thomas, "we should never, or hardly ever, sin."²

It is unlikely that a man who is committing sin adverts to the fact that God is watching him and could intervene to punish him at any moment. He has forgotten the presence of God, his Creator and Redeemer, Who has been so good to him and Who will one day be his Judge. His mind has been darkened and his heart led astray by the deceptive pleasures of this world.

God is far from the sinner because the sinner ignores His inspirations and advice and has, in short, rejected Him. The unhappy man will never find peace in this world and is doomed to eternal unhappiness in the next.

"If we remained always in the presence of God," wrote St. John Chrysostom, "we should neither conceive nor do anything evil."³

2. The presence of God, moreover, encourages us to do our best to acquire all the virtues. When He is always before our eyes we have no difficulty in recognising that He is the supreme Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.

Let us seek to please God, therefore, by obeying His commandments and inspirations. If we wish to be worthy of His presence, let us seek to adorn our souls with His grace, which is ours for the asking. Our awareness of God's presence should not be a passive state. It should enliven our faith and increase our love for Him.

Do we realise how poor and pitiful we are in the sight of God? Let us ask Him to make us holy. If we are troubled by temptations, let us ask Him for the strength to conquer them. If we are worn out by suffering, let us ask Him to help and console us.

3. If we remind ourselves constantly of the presence of God, we shall always be closely united to Him. Union with God should be the result of our love for Him, for it is an unfailing rule of love that it increases with the nearness of the beloved. If we live in the presence of God and contemplate Him as the perfection of beauty, truth and goodness, we shall be moved to love Him more and more. Our love, moreover, will generate in us the ardent desire of an even closer intimacy with Him.

This sacred union will bring us great peace and tranquillity in all the vicissitudes of life, a serenity which will be reflected in our personality and in our conduct for the edification of our fellow-men.

¹ Al. Div. Servizio, III, 1, 3.

² Opusc. 58, c. 2.

³ Homil. VIII ad Phil., 2.

2nd August

HOW TO REMAIN AWARE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. It is useful to consider the ways in which we can develop a constant and effective awareness of the presence of God. The first way in which we can do this is by cultivating a lively faith

which will help us to see God everywhere. *Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?*¹

This kind of faith should deepen our sense of God's presence and inspire in us sentiments of love and gratitude which will guide us in all our actions. We cannot expect that we shall be able to remain in a state of constant contemplation of God, for this is the privilege enjoyed by the blessed in Heaven, for whom faith has been replaced by the Beatific Vision. We must be satisfied with exciting in ourselves as often as possible the active awareness of God's presence. This should be a quiet and peaceful process, not involving undue mental effort or anxiety.

We should be able to attend quite naturally to our work and other obligations, and we should be helped and consoled in this by directing our thoughts to God from time to time in order to offer ourselves to Him. This can easily be done by means of frequent ejaculatory prayer, by renewing at regular intervals our intention of doing everything for the love of God, and by being prepared to endure in complete acceptance of the Divine Will all the hardships and trials of the day. Whenever it is possible, moreover, we should escape from the care and confusion of the world into a quiet church. Here we can kneel in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist and express in intimate prayer our love for Him and our desire to serve Him.

2. Another way of increasing our sense of the presence of God is to perceive Him in all His creatures. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus loved to contemplate the image of her Creator in the flowers of the field and in the stars of the firmament.

God has created all things for our benefit and He is present in all things. He sees what use we make of them and can judge whether we employ them to honour Him, Who is our beginning and our end. The ray of divine beauty which shines in every created thing should attract us towards its Creator and cause us to adore and serve Him. Whenever we meet a learned and holy person, moreover, the reflection of God's power and goodness

is even more compelling. "Learn to love the Creator in the creature," says St. Augustine, "lest the thing which He has made should grip you, and you should lose Him by Whom you also were created."²

In other words, let us learn to see the Creator in all His creatures so that these may not enslave us and cause us to lose Him Who is our highest Good.

3. The third way of remaining attentive to the presence of God is to contemplate Him living in ourselves. While it is true that God is present everywhere, He dwells in a special manner in the human soul, which is the masterpiece of creation. When our souls are adorned with His grace, His delight in us is unbounded. *I will dwell and move among them. I will be their God and they shall be my people.*³ *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*⁴

God dwells among us, therefore, and lives in us as in so many temples. We should recognise His presence and listen to His voice; furthermore, we should adore Him, love Him, and pray to Him. Then we can sincerely claim to belong entirely to Him.

¹ Jer. 23, 24.

² St. Augustine, In Ps. 19.

³ 2 Cor. 6, 16.

⁴ 1 Cor. 3, 16.

3rd August

A HOLY DEATH

1. Now and again it is useful for Christians to dedicate a day to meditation on the subject of death. It is useful because it is easy to regard our own death as something theoretical and remote, whereas in fact we ought always to be prepared to die since it is *at an hour that you do not expect the Son of Man is coming.*¹ It may be at the hour when we are least expecting it that God

will come to take us, and it will be on our spiritual state at this hour that our eternity will depend.

We know neither when nor where death will surprise us. It may be to-day, it may be in a few years. It may come suddenly, or maybe after a long illness. We may be in bed or in the middle of a street, in hospital or at home. Finally, we may be resigned, comforted by the presence of a priest and by the reception of the last sacraments, or we may be alone and deprived of these consolations.

It is essential, therefore, to be always prepared, fortified by faith, charity and good works. If we are really prepared, it will not matter when, where, or how death comes, for it will be to us like the good Sister Death of St. Francis of Assisi. It will release us from this corrupt mortal flesh and open to us the gates of everlasting happiness. Then we shall fly joyfully into the arms of our Creator and Redeemer Whom we have tried hard to love and serve.

But if we are not prepared, what then? How bitter it will be to have to leave the world to which we have become so attached. What remorse we shall feel at the remembrance of our innumerable sins, badly confessed and never attoned for, and at the realisation that we have failed to do so much good which we could have done, whereas now we shall have to appear before the Eternal Judge with nothing to offer.

2. When we meditate on death, then, we should resolve to remain always prepared. Besides this, we should make an act of perfect resignation to the will of God, accepting from Him whatever illnesses He may ask us to endure and whatever kind of death He has destined for us. We should promise to accept everything as long as He will allow us to die in the state of grace.

We should frequently offer to God, as a guarantee of our love and as satisfaction for our sins and negligences, the sufferings with which we shall be afflicted during our last illness. We shall be comforted in our final hours by the remembrance of this

total offering of ourselves which we have so often repeated. Like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, we shall be able to pray: *Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as thou willest.*²

3. During our meditation on death we should seize the opportunity of asking God for the favour of dying with the consolation of the last sacraments. Let us pray that in our final moments we may be comforted and reassured by the sacramental absolution and blessing of the priest at our bedside, and that Jesus may visit us once more in the Blessed Eucharist to revive our faith, hope, and love, and to strengthen us for our journey into eternity. Finally, let us pray that, before we have lost consciousness, Extreme Unction may heal our spiritual scars, make us worthy to see God, and assist us to pass peacefully from this vale of tears into everlasting happiness.

¹ Luke 12, 40.

² Mt. 26, 39.

4th August

THE CRUCIFIX

1. *I determined not to know anything among you, wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*¹

It was St. Paul's boast that, while the Jews were looking for signs and the Greeks were searching for wisdom, he continued to preach about Christ on the Cross. *The Jews ask for signs, and the Greeks look for 'wisdom'; but we, for our part, preach a crucified Christ—to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness.*²

Christian doctrine and Christian living are centred around Jesus Crucified. Unfortunately, in modern times as in the time of St. Paul, the Crucifix is either ignored and forgotten or attacked as a symbol of folly.

There is no need to be amazed at this. When the holy old man, Simeon, took Jesus in his arms, he made the prophecy that this Child would be *a sign that shall be contradicted*.³ The world is proud of its scientific and technical progress, whereas the Crucifix is the symbol of the lowliness to which God Himself descended for love of us. The world is looking for pleasure and voluptuousness, whereas the Crucifix preaches to us the spirit of sacrifice and the purifying value of suffering. The world is fond of ease, riches and honours; the Crucifix demonstrates the depths of the love of God, Who became man for our sakes, suffered and died to redeem us from sin, taught us fraternal love, and commanded us to carry our cross daily if we wished to follow Him.

We must choose whether to follow Jesus Crucified or to follow the world. The world can only give us a vain and passing satisfaction, while the Crucifix can give us the peace of a good conscience, even in the midst of sorrow and trouble, and the hope of lasting happiness in the next life.

2. The Crucifix is the open book in which men can read of God's infinite love for them. The Saints wept before the Crucifix because they realised that the sufferings and death of the Redeemer were the result of sin, and so they learned to avoid sin at all costs. They meditated on the last words of Jesus dying on the Cross, words which so clearly illustrated His infinite mercy towards us.

We should follow the example of the Saints in this devotion. Let the Crucifix be the most precious object in our homes, and let us love to hold it in our hands. Let it recall for us the tragedy of Mount Calvary, when Jesus was stripped of His garments and nailed to the Cross, was raised up to suffer indescribable agonies, forgave his executioners and forgave us our sins, pardoned the penitent thief, and bequeathed to us the last treasured possession which was left to Him, His most holy Mother.

Let us weep for our sins and increase in love for our divine

Redeemer. When we are oppressed by the weight of our own cross, we shall look at the Crucifix and find comfort. When we are tempted, we shall grasp the Crucifix and turn away with horror from thoughts of sin and ingratitude.

The Crucifix will teach us, as it taught the Saints, the lesson of charity towards God and towards our neighbour. It will teach us to hate sin and to love virtue. If we cherish it during life, it will be our consolation to kiss the Crucifix at the moment of death.

¹ I Cor. 2, 2.

² I Cor. 1, 22-23.

³ Luke 2, 34.

5th August

SACRED IMAGES

I. There are two extremes to be avoided in venerating the images of Christ and the Saints. In emulation of the ancient heresy of the Iconoclasts, there are some who regard the veneration of images as a superstitious and idolatrous practice. In support of their view they quote from the Book of Exodus: *You shall not carve idols for yourselves . . . you shall not bow down before them or worship them.*¹

The equivocation is obvious. This prohibition refers to the images of false gods, not to the images of Saints. It is the worship of idols which is forbidden, not devotion to the Saints. There are examples in the Old Testament of the veneration of images and symbols indicating the presence of God, such as the Ark of the Covenant, adorned by *two cherubim of beaten gold*,² and the bronze serpent mounted by Moses on a pole in the desert.³

From the early days of the church there existed in the Catacombs representations of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, and the Martyrs, and the fact that they were adorned with haloes is a clear indication of the veneration with which they were regarded by the faithful. The historian Eusebius specifically mentions a

bronze statue erected in honour of the Saviour, before which the faithful prayed and were sometimes rewarded with miracles.

Contrary to the accusations of some Protestants, therefore, this practice is not a novelty introduced by the Roman Church. Moreover, the honouring of images is not idolatry because it is not a direct adoration, but a relative and indirect veneration. Homage is not paid to the actual statues or pictures, but to Christ, the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, whom the images represent.

“The images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of other saints are to be kept with honour in places of worship especially; and to them due honour and veneration is to be paid—not because it is believed that there is any divinity or power intrinsic to them for which they are revered, nor because it is from them that something is sought, nor that a blind trust is to be attached to images as it once was by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown to them is referred to the prototypes which they represent.”⁴

The cult of images has, therefore, a solid theological foundation. “We make images of holy men,” as St. Cyril of Alexandria expressed it, “not to adore them as Gods, but as a reminder and a stimulus to ourselves to imitate them. Moreover, we make images of Christ so that our love for Him may be more easily aroused.”⁵ Besides being theologically correct, the practice is also useful.

2. The opposite extreme of over-superstitious veneration of images must also be avoided. As St. Gregory the Great observed, sacred images should be regarded as a means of impressing on simple minds the virtues which they ought to emulate. Sometimes, however, the ignorance of the faithful in this regard needs to be corrected.

It is not unusual to enter a church and to see crowds of people around statues of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, laying flowers

at their feet and lighting innumerable candles. Meanwhile, the Altar of the Blessed Sacrament is deserted. Excessive homage can be paid to particular images, in such a manner as to suggest that the piety of the worshippers is directed towards the material images themselves rather than towards the Redeemer or our Divine Mother or the Saints. We must be careful to ensure that our devotion does not become corrupted by superstition.

3. Apart from avoiding the two extremes of behaviour which have been mentioned, we should cultivate a proper respect for the images of saintly men who have benefited mankind. If we can cherish so dearly the portraits of our parents, how much more should we revere the images of Christ, Our Lady and the Saints? We should kneel before them and imagine that the loved ones are present whom they represent. As we are praying, we should remember the virtues of those to whom we pray and resolve to follow in their footsteps.

¹ Exod. 20, 4-5.

² Exod. 25, 18.

³ Num. 21, 8.

⁴ Council of Trent, Sess. XXV.

⁵ In Ps. 113, 16.

⁶ Epist., IX, 105.

6th August

RICHES AND POVERTY

1. There is a striking contrast between the luxurious living of wealthy people who waste their money on pleasure and amusement and the abject poverty of those who are without food, clothing and shelter. This is in complete contradiction of the Gospel message which has proclaimed that we are all brothers.

Extravagance is always self-centred, whereas Christianity is the creed of love. Sumptuous living cannot be justified by an appeal to the right to own private property, for it is a shameless betrayal of the Gospel spirit of fraternal charity. When St. Thomas is defending the right to private property, he adds at once: "In regard to the use of it, however, a man should not

regard material goods as belonging entirely to himself, but . . . should be ready to share them with others in their necessity.”¹ If such maxims which derive their inspiration from the Gospel were put into practice, there would be neither excessive wealth nor excessive poverty in the world today.

It is true that there would still be poverty, but destitution would disappear.

Poverty is good in that it makes us detached from worldly things and helps us to think more about the next life. But destitution is really a social crime, for it is the result of human egoism and can breed hatred and spiritual degradation.

“Poverty,” writes Péguy, “is decent. It does not dress in rags . . . Its dwelling is tidy, healthy, and affords a welcome. It can have a change of linen once a week. It is not emaciated nor hungry . . . It is not good for anyone to live in easy circumstances; on the contrary, it is much better always to feel the goad of necessity . . .”²

It was in this sense that Jesus blessed the poor and condemned the rich. He is referring to the poor man who has enough to supply his needs, is detached from worldly possessions, uses his poverty to assist him in his journey towards Heaven, and is happy or at any rate content. But He condemns the rich man who squanders his wealth on selfish amusement and is deaf to the entreaties of those in need.

After twenty centuries of Christianity the violent contrast still exists in modern society. If we have any reason to reproach ourselves, let us try now to make up for our deficiencies.

2. We must face this unfortunate fact. One half of the world is living in luxury while the other half lives in squalor. Worse still, both the inanity and arrogance of the wealthy and the degradation and abjectness of the destitute extinguish the light of the Gospel and drown the voice of conscience.

Who is at fault? We must all share the blame, for nobody has ever fully implemented the Gospel teaching, which alone

contains a complete solution for the problems of the human race. A great deal of want and misery would disappear if all those whose assets exceed what they need for themselves remembered that they are obliged to love their neighbour as themselves. They would then take heed of the precept: *Give that which remains as alms.*³ We should all examine ourselves rigidly on this point, because we could all do far more to help the needy, whom we do not love, unfortunately, as much as we love ourselves.

3. In this matter as in all others, we have a great deal to learn from the Saints. Not only did they give to the poor whatever was superfluous to themselves, but they deprived themselves even of the necessities of life because they saw in their destitute fellow-men the person of Jesus Christ. They really loved their neighbour as themselves, and more than themselves, in fact, for the sake of the love of God. For this reason they enjoyed clothing the naked and feeding the hungry whenever it was in their power to do so.

We may not be capable of doing exactly the same because we have not reached the same height of perfection. But we must remember that the precept to "give that which remains as alms" applies also to us. If there is somebody in grave need whom we have the means of helping, we are obliged to do so by the command of the Gospel. It is the same Gospel which warns us that if we fail to do so, the Divine Judge will one day condemn us.

¹ St. Thomas, II-II, q. 66, a. 2.

² La guerre et la paix, p. 338.

³ Luke II, 41.

7th August

ALMSGIVING

1. The view has been expressed that almsgiving is useless and degrading. It is useless, it has been said, because the implementation of social justice should be sufficient to provide for the

needs of everybody; and it is degrading, it has been held, because it places the poor man in a position of inferiority to the rich man, and makes him beg for that which is really his right.

This is a false line of reasoning. Social justice can and should do a great deal to achieve a more equal distribution of wealth among men. But social justice cannot do everything.

Until the end of the world the weak will always succumb in the battle of life before the energy and enterprise of the strong. There will always be unfortunates who by reason of some tragic accident are unable to fend for themselves. No matter what form it takes, the State will not be able to provide fully for the disabled and infirm.

There will always be plenty of scope for Christian charity, which does not proceed with the measured stride of justice but with the swift wings of the love of God. It seeks out sorrows which need to be assuaged and wants which need to be relieved. There will always be suffering and want upon earth. *The poor you have always with you*,¹ Jesus has told us.

It cannot be said that almsgiving is degrading because it makes the receiver inferior to the giver. This may be so if alms are given from motives of mere philanthropy. But when almsgiving is accompanied by charity and understanding and the donor sees in the poor man the person of Jesus Christ, there is no difference of status between the two individuals. They are brothers who wish to love and help one another, since both are members of the mystical Body of Christ. In this case it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Christian almsgiving is the fulfilment of an obligation and is a source of merit for the giver. As for the receiver, not only are his wants relieved, but he is the means by which his wealthier brother can acquire merit and fulfil his obligations.

2. Even if it is not very great, wealth is a dangerous thing. It is a burden which hampers us spiritually unless it is enriched by charity. Of itself, wealth is opposed to the spirit of the Gospel.

In the Church of God, therefore, the only fitting role which rich men can assume is to place their abundance at the service of charity and become the servants of the poor.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that wealth can be an instrument of virtue and that it is only in this sense that it can be called good. If it impedes the practice of virtue, then it is evil.² Let us make good use of our assets, therefore, and give generously to those who are in need without allowing our motives to become tainted with self-interest.

*Sell what you have and give alms, said Christ. Make for yourselves purses that do not grow old, a treasure unfailing in heaven where neither thief draws near nor moth destroys.*³ It is the possession of this kind of treasure that will comfort us at the hour of death.

3. We must be detached from the goods of this world because they are corruptible and cause us to forget God. Even if we have been placed in easy circumstances, let us be poor in spirit. We can be poor in spirit by giving alms from motives of Christian charity. We need the mercy of God, and Our Lord has told us that He will be merciful only to those who show mercy to others.

We need God's forgiveness for all our sins, and the Holy Spirit assures us that our iniquities are redeemed by almsgiving. *Redeem thou thy sins with alms and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor.*⁴ Almsgiving is a means to our personal sanctification.

¹ Mt. 26, 11.

² Contra Gentes III, 134.

³ Luke 12, 33.

⁴ Dan. 4, 24.

8th August

MORE ABOUT ALMSGIVING

1. The description of the Last Judgment in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel would shock many people if

they were to read it. The principles in accordance with which Christ will pronounce sentence are inescapably clear. Did you feed and clothe the poor for My sake, He will ask, because you recognised Me in them? If you have done so, you will certainly be saved. If you have neglected to do so, you will be condemned for all eternity. Christ does not ask about anything else, because everything else is subordinate to the precept of charity. Where there is charity, everything else follows. Where charity is lacking there is nothing else, because Christianity is synonymous with charity. Charity, says St. Paul, *is the bond of perfection*.¹

*If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, St. Paul says elsewhere, but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal . . . and if I have all faith so as to move mountains yet do not have charity, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor . . . yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing.*²

So our eternal salvation depends on our charity. But it must be charity in action, not merely in words. *He who has the goods of this world, says St. John, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?*³ Charity must be expressed in almsgiving and good works, for otherwise it would be a matter of idle talk which would be powerless to save us.

Our almsgiving should not be dictated simply by natural feelings of compassion, however, nor by mere philanthropy. It should be pre-eminently a religious act, springing from supernatural motives. Because we see the person of Christ in the poor man, we should love and help him as we should our Divine Redeemer, of Whose Mystical Body he is a suffering member. This is real Christian charity.

A proud man may also be liberal in giving away money in order to draw attention to himself. But this is not Christian almsgiving, which is never the product of self-love but of the

love of God. Let us be more generous in giving, therefore, but let us always give from the supernatural motive of Christian charity.

2. We should often read and contemplate passages in praise of charity and almsgiving which are contained in the Sacred Scriptures. *Give that which remains as alms, and behold, all things are clean to you.*⁴ *Alms delivereth from death; and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting.*⁵ *Redeem thou thy sins with alms and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor.*⁶ *My son, rob not the poor man of his livelihood: force not the eyes of the needy to turn away.*⁷ *Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.*⁸ *Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful . . . Give, and it shall be given to you . . . For with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.*⁹ *For judgment is without mercy to him who has not shown mercy . . . And if a brother or a sister be naked and in want of daily food, and one of you say to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," yet you do not give them what is necessary for the body, what does it profit? So faith too, unless it has works, is dead in itself.*¹⁰

3. Let us give away as much as we can in charity, therefore. It does not matter whether we can afford to give a large sum or a very small amount; the important thing is to give. God knows our inmost thoughts; He can judge how detached we are from worldly goods, and if He sees that we are prepared to share them willingly with the unfortunate poor for His sake, He will reward us one day. But if we are avaricious and indifferent to the sufferings of others, He will condemn us to everlasting punishment.

There is one act of charity which we can all perform, even if we are poor. We can pray for those who never pray, for hardened sinners, for heretics, for those who persecute the Church, for the Missions, for the sick and dying, and for the souls in Purgatory. This is a spiritual almsgiving of which we are all

capable. Besides prayer, there are all the other spiritual works of mercy from which to choose.

¹ Col. 3, 14.

² Cf. 1 Cor. 13, 1-3.

³ 1 Ep. 3, 17.

⁴ Luke 11, 41.

⁵ Tob. 12, 9.

⁶ Dan. 4, 24.

⁷ Ecclus. 4, 1.

⁸ Ecclus. 3, 29.

⁹ Luke 6, 36-38.

¹⁰ James 2, 13-17.

9th August

RASH JUDGMENT

I. Instead of examining their own consciences in the presence of God, there are many people who are always prepared to judge the thoughts and actions of others. Do you belong to this category? Reflect for a while on the words of the Gospel.

*Do not judge, said Christ, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you. But why dost thou see the speck in thy brother's eye, and yet dost not consider the beam in thine own eye? Or how canst thou say to thy brother, "let me cast out the speck from thy eye"; and behold, there is a beam in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam from thy own eye, and then thou wilt see clearly to cast out the speck from thy brother's eye.*¹

These severe words condemn rash judgments; they also impose on us the obligation of correcting our own faults rather than censuring those of others. We are warned, moreover, that if we judge others harshly, the Divine Judge will treat us with equal severity.

A judgment is rash when it is formed without any sure basis and without necessity. It is a difficult thing to penetrate the secrets of the human heart and conscience. Only God can do it with absolute certainty. St. Bernard remarked that anyone who judges others rashly is usurping a right which belongs to Almighty God. How can we possibly guess at the motives and intentions of our fellow-men?

It is fairer and kinder to be ready to excuse our fellow-men

and to appreciate their good qualities. We should leave it to God to judge their deficiencies and occupy ourselves with making amendment for our own sins.

2. Rash judgments are sometimes formed quite thoughtlessly. At other times they are the product of malice, envy, pride, or hatred. Even when they are lightly arrived at, they are sinful because they are opposed to the law of charity. When they are the result of one of the passions mentioned, they are far more gravely sinful, because they presuppose the intention of injuring our neighbour. Rash judgments like this rarely remain enclosed in the mind, but are expressed openly with consequent damage to the character of the victim.

It is easy to progress from lighter faults to grave sin in this matter. A rash judgment soon becomes a slander, and a sin against charity soon becomes a sin against justice involving an obligation to make reparation.

3. Let us contemplate Jesus as our model. While He was hanging from the Cross, He looked down compassionately upon His jeering enemies. Not only did He pray for them and forgive them, but He even made excuses for them to His heavenly Father. *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*²

It is still the same. Very often when people commit sin they do so because they have not reflected about what they are doing.

For this reason we should always be kind in our judgments and prudent about expressing them. A harsh judgment can cause irreparable damage to our brother's character, whereas a kind word can lead him back from the path of evil.

¹ Mt. 7, 1-5.

² Luke 23, 24.

10th August

THE MYSTERY OF LIFE

1. "Life," said the poet Tommaseo, "is only a remembrance, a hope, and a passing moment."

How true this is. This life which preoccupies us so much is only a point of time which continually passes and evades us. We live on memories and on hopes, but in reality our life is no more than an elusive period of time flowing into the ocean of eternity.

Yesterday we did not exist, and tomorrow we shall be no more. Yesterday God called us forth from nothingness, and tomorrow He will summon us from this fleeting existence in order to reward or punish us in eternity. It is the great mystery of life that so much depends on a vanishing moment of time.

We have two alternatives. We can direct our course in life towards God, in which case we shall one day be happy with Him for ever. Or we can travel in the opposite direction in pursuit of sensual satisfaction and transitory worldly success, in which case we shall one day be rejected by God and shall be doomed to everlasting unhappiness.

Let us reflect on the importance of our choice.

2. We know that the past can never return and that the future is so uncertain that it may not even exist for us. We realise that our life is nothing more than a passing moment. If we meditate on these truths, how can we be attached to worldly objects? Even if we could attain the objects of our desire, they would soon be snatched away from us.

Let us aim at those lasting values which are not passing, which can remain with us during life, comfort us at death, and accompany us into eternity. We know what these substantial values are—holiness, the grace of God, the conquest of our sensible appetites, and the final enjoyment of God in Heaven. These things do not pass away, but will remain with us for ever.

3. These reflections reveal to us the transience of this life and make sorrows and hardship seem easier to endure, and even welcome if we know how to offer them to God. What difference will the sufferings of a past existence make?

What will remain tomorrow of the trials which we have

encountered today? Only a consoling memory, as long as we have offered them to God. Let us examine all our affections, desires and sufferings in the light of eternity. Viewed in that relationship, they can all become a source of self-sanctification.

11th August

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

1. Let us meditate on the parable concerning the talents. A lord was preparing to go abroad and before he departed he called together his servants. He distributed his assets among them in proportion to their ability, giving five talents to the first, two to the second, and one to the third.

After a long time the master returned and asked his servants to render an account of the money entrusted to them. Those who had received, respectively, the five and the two talents returned the capital to their lord along with the profits which they had made, so that in fact each was able to hand back double the sum originally entrusted to him. Their master praised their fidelity and zeal and rewarded them more handsomely than they could ever have expected.

Finally, the man who had received only one talent appeared and said: *Master, I know that thou art a stern man; thou reapest where thou hast not sowed and gatherest where thou hast not winnowed; and as I was afraid, I went away and hid thy talent in the earth; behold, thou hast what is thine.* The master's reply was stern. *Wicked and slothful servant! thou didst know that I reap where I do not sow, and gather where I have not winnowed! Thou shouldst therefore have entrusted my money to the bankers, and on my return I should have got back my own with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and . . . cast him forth into the darkness outside, where there will be the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth.*¹

The meaning of this parable is clear. We are all servants to whom our heavenly Father has entrusted various talents. Some have been given more than others. By our own labour and industry we must all make profitable use of the talents which we have received. The ungrateful and slothful servant who does not make good use of his talents will be severely punished. But a happy reward awaits the good and faithful servant who has worked zealously all his life for his Master's interests until the talents which he has received have produced an increase of sanctity in himself and in others.

2. As a general rule, God gives us three kinds of talents. These are (i) material, like health or riches; (ii) intellectual and moral, such as intelligence, personality, and ability; and (iii) supernatural, like divine grace, a vocation, or extraordinary powers. God distributes lavishly all these talents, to whomsoever He pleases and in accordance with His own hidden designs.

We have no right, therefore, to envy the talents of others nor to be discontented with our own. Rather should we be grateful to God for whatever He has given us and remember that sufferings and deprivations may also be used as a means of self-sanctification. If we cheerfully accept and offer to God our lack of certain talents, we can gain great merit.

3. We should never complain about the amount which we have received. It would be more appropriate to tremble at the thought of how much we have received. If anyone has received very little, he will have to account for very little. But a man who has received a great deal is responsible before God for the manner in which he has employed all the gifts entrusted to him.

Our own pride and spirit of ostentation is responsible for any discontent which we may feel concerning our state in life and our abilities. But if we are chiefly concerned for the glory of God and for our eternal salvation, then it will not matter to us how much we have received. Let us be satisfied with the position in life in which God has placed us. Let those of us who are not

exceptionally talented thank God for the little we have received, but if we have been endowed with a great many gifts, let us anxiously consider how we are employing them. In either case, let us work hard to make the best possible use of the talents which God has granted to us.

¹ Cf. Mt. 25, 14-30.

12th August

CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM

I. There are two kinds of optimism. The first is the optimism of worldlings who expect nothing but pleasure from life. They run away from anything which smacks of sacrifice or self-control, and as a result virtue is completely outside their grasp. Their motto is the "carpe diem" of the poet Horace.¹ Living for the day in this fashion, they seem to uphold the philosophy which the Book of Wisdom puts on the lips of the foolish: *Come, let us enjoy the good things that are real, and use the freshness of creation avidly. Let us have our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no springtime blossom pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds ere they wither; let no meadow be free from our wantonness.*²

This kind of optimism is an inversion of true human values. It is the result of the domination which man's lower instincts can sometimes acquire over his reason. But because our natural longing for what is good can never be completely stifled, this pleasant epicurean approach always leaves in its wake a sense of disillusionment.

Sooner or later this optimism is converted into pessimism. Human pleasure must always turn to sorrow, and at this stage, unless some miracle of divine grace intervenes, the spirit rebels and falls prey to despair. It is true that most of us will have avoided the worst excesses of the epicurean outlook, but we

may have developed a distortedly comfortable and selfish approach to life. If this is so, we should remember that our lives are in conflict with Christian principles.

Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, Jesus said, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.³ Unless you repent, you will all perish.⁴ The kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force.⁵ If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.⁶

Let us consider whether our lives are in accordance with this teaching.

2. There is also a Christian optimism, for Christianity is essentially optimistic. The Jansenist conception of Christianity as a gloomy and fearfully exacting creed is quite erroneous. Jesus has told us that His yoke is easy and His burden light, and St. Paul speaks of the arrival of *the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour.*⁷ We have only to recall the parables of the prodigal son and the lost sheep, and Christ's encounters with Mary Magdalen and the repentant adulteress.

Christianity, then, is not opposed to the principles of natural goodness; it does not frown upon the blessings of life, on normal human affections, and on the love of beauty. *Whatever things are true, says St. Paul, whatever honourable, whatever just, whatever holy, whatever lovable, whatever of good repute, if there be any virtue, if anything worthy of praise, think upon these things.*⁸ Christian teaching does not hold that our natural inclinations are evil, for they are forces which can be channelled to lead us towards holiness.

3. Sin alone is essentially evil, because it offends God, our Supreme Good, and separates us from Him. Even sin is only evil in so far as it is a deliberate act in which we find pleasure and continued satisfaction. But if it is washed away by tears of repentance and by sacramental Confession, even sin becomes a source of goodness, for it leads us back to God.

Christianity makes everything good and meritorious, even suffering. Only Christianity can give us an explanation of suffering, which can be employed by our acceptance of it as a valuable means of expiation and sanctification.

Only in Christianity can the human heart find satisfaction and peace. Christian optimism abhors the malice of sin, lightens our sufferings, and moderates our pleasures. It helps us to see God's image in all creatures, gives us joy in life and hope in the hour of death. In this sense, let us be optimists.

¹ Horace, Carm. I, 11, 8.

² Wisdom 2, 6-8.

³ Cf. John 12, 24.

⁴ Luke 13, 5.

⁵ Mt. 11, 12.

⁶ Luke 9, 23.

⁷ Tit. 3, 4.

⁸ Cf. Phil. 4, 8.

13th August

WORK AND WORRY

1. When we recite the Lord's Prayer, we say with confidence "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." This does not mean, however, that we renounce in a spirit of fatalism all right to action and initiative on our part.

Faith, says St. James, *unless it has works, is dead in itself*.¹ The same applies to charity.²

Faith and charity must be accompanied by action, which should always be inspired by the interior life. But our external activity should never be allowed to quench the flame of the divine life within us. If this should happen, our labour would grow sterile and would receive no blessing from God.

We should work hard, but should always act as if death might come at any moment. In other words, we should not become completely absorbed in our work, but should keep before our minds the ideals of the glory of God, our own sanctification, and the salvation of our neighbour. If our efforts seem to be successful, we should thank God. But if all our work appears

to be in vain we should thank Him just the same, for such things happen with God's permission. Providence often guides events in its own way for the promotion of God's glory and for our greater good, which can be achieved through our humiliation as well as through our success.

If our spiritual outlook is in conformity with these principles, we shall be able to preserve our peace of mind no matter how busy we may be.

2. There are many people who claim that they are working for God and for souls. In fact, they do work hard and make great sacrifices, but at the first sign of failure they are disappointed and discouraged. Why is this? It is because they only believed that they were working for God and for His Church, whereas in their heart and soul they were more influenced by self-love and by a desire for the praise and approval of others. Their motives were not completely disinterested, and their sacrifices were not made entirely for God. Therefore they were disturbed by visions of success in human terms and were agitated at the prospect of failure.

The Saints worked hard also, but they never worried. They were always calm, because their attention was focused on Heaven rather than on themselves. As long as we work entirely for God and accept as His will the outcome of our efforts, everything will go well for us even when it seems to be going badly.

3. Some people imagine that they are not working properly unless they are worrying and fretting and attracting the attention of others. This kind of approach results in more agitation than action. These people are working more for worldly glory than for the glory of God, and their best efforts are ruined by self-love. *They have received their reward,*³ and they cannot hope to be rewarded in the next life.

We should aim at a purity of intention which will inspire us to do everything for the love of God. We should remember

that the internal action of grace is what matters most in the life of a Christian. If that is lacking, all our external activity is worthless in the sight of God.

¹ James 2, 17-26.

² James 2, 13-17.

³ Mt. 6, 2-5.

14th August

CHRISTIAN JOY

1. Christianity is neither sad nor pessimistic. On the contrary, it is the harbinger of *great joy*,¹ to quote the expression used by the Angels when they announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Obviously, this joy is something quite distinct from sensible pleasure. It is the spiritual happiness which accompanies an innocent life, sorrow for sin, or suffering bravely borne for the love of God.

Any other form of earthly happiness can never be more than a partial and transitory pleasure, incapable of satisfying the human heart completely. When Christianity urges us to be detached from worldly objects, however, it does not condemn the joys of the present life. The historian Tacitus was very far from the truth when, in the description in his *Annals* of the burning of Rome at the time of Nero, he accused the Christians of hating the human race, although not of having set fire to the city. Although the teaching of Christianity is preoccupied with the joys of Heaven, it does not frown upon legitimate worldly pleasures.

Jesus *went about doing good and healing all who were in the power of the devil.*² He loved to give joy to others and sanctified the marriage feast of Cana by His presence and by working His first miracle there. He restored happiness to the widow of Naim by raising her son to life, and to Martha and Mary by giving

them back their brother, Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. He spent His entire life giving happiness to others.

There is only one kind of merriment which Christianity cannot countenance, and that is the inordinate pleasure which leads to sin or is the result of sin. This kind of pleasure has no kinship with spiritual joy. It is a momentary exaltation which soon disappears and leaves behind disillusionment and remorse. It leads inevitably to sorrow; this is a chastisement from God which can only become meritorious if it is offered up in expiation. *The end of joy may be sorrow*,³ says the Book of Proverbs. For this reason let us seek spiritual joys, not those which lead to sin nor those which are the result of sin.

2. In his letters St. Paul frequently exhorts the early Christians to be joyful. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.*⁴ *The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness . . .*⁵ But we are to remember that *the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink, but in justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*⁶

St. Paul emphasises that this joy need not be lost in times of tribulation. *I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our troubles.*⁷ In the life of a Christian, joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive, but complement and perfect one another.

This does not mean that Christianity essentially transforms human nature and banishes the pangs of suffering. It means simply that everything in human nature is purified and elevated so that it may be deserving of Heaven, where true and lasting happiness is to be found. *Be fervent in spirit, says St. Paul, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope,*⁸ *and as sorrowful, always rejoicing.*⁹

3. If we live good lives, hoping for a Heavenly reward and guided by the action of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we shall possess this spiritual joy. Once we possess it, it will be erased neither by temptation nor by suffering nor by persecution, as long as our faith remains firm and steadfast. The sincere Christian accepts pleasure and pain with equal readiness because he places everything in God's hands.

This explains what Jesus had in mind when He said: *Blessed are you poor . . . Blessed are you who hunger . . . Blessed are you who weep . . . Blessed shall you be when men hate you and when they shut you out and reproach you . . .*¹⁰ The Saints were happy in spite of suffering and persecution. We must try at least to achieve that spirit of complete resignation to God's will which is always rewarded by peace of soul.

¹ Luke 2, 10.² Acts 10, 38.³ Prov. 14, 13.⁴ Phil. 4, 4.⁵ Cf. Gal. 5, 22.⁶ Rom. 14, 17.⁷ 2 Cor. 7, 4.⁸ Rom. 12, 12.⁹ 2 Cor. 6, 10.¹⁰ Luke 6, 20-22.

15th August

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR BLESSED LADY

I. It is generally believed that Our Blessed Lady died, since she would not have wished to escape death any more than her divine Son did. Our Lord, however, had seen her sharing in His agony and death upon Mount Calvary, and He willed that her own death would be so peaceful as hardly to justify the name.

The just die in the love of God and the martyrs died for the love of God. But Mary died consumed by the love of God. It was not disease which brought an end to her life, but love. Her love for Jesus was more ardent and more perfect than that of any other creature. She loved Him when she held Him in her arms in the stable at Bethlehem, when she fled with Him into Egypt, and when she offered Him in the temple to His heavenly Father. She loved Him when she found Him after He had been lost and when she looked after Him in their home at Nazareth. She loved Him as she followed Him to His death on Calvary. She loved him in the joy of His Resurrection and, subsequently, of His Ascension into Heaven. Jesus desired her to remain on earth for a while to comfort the infant Church and to initiate the loving patronage which she would exercise over it in Heaven.

Her love grew from day to day until it entirely consumed her and her immaculate heart could no longer contain it. Mary fulfilled in a most perfect manner the Creator's command to His creatures to love Him with all their hearts and with all their strength. Consequently, her love reached such a peak that her soul in its final ecstasy glided from her body.

Let us ask our Mother, Mary, to help us to die with the love and grace of God in our hearts, and with the names of Jesus and Mary on our lips.

2. Even as Christ by His own power rose from the grave, so by reason of His intervention the soul of Mary was reunited, after a short separation, with her body, and she was taken up body and soul into everlasting glory. It was fitting that this privilege should have been bestowed on the Mother of God. It would have been unbecoming for the immaculate flesh in which the divine body of Jesus was formed to have been allowed to corrupt in the grave. It was fitting, too, that she who was to be proclaimed Queen of Angels and of men should have come immediately to her throne of glory with her humanity integral and unimpaired. Her resurrection was, moreover, the reward of her virginal purity. From the first moment of her conception she was preserved free from original sin and from every evil inclination, and throughout her life she had advanced farther and farther in the way of perfection.

We shall rise one day also, O Blessed Mother. Grant in your great love for us that we may so imitate your example as to deserve to rise in glory and to be associated with you in everlasting happiness.

3. After she had risen, Mary was gloriously taken up into Heaven. Jesus has ascended into Heaven by His own power, but Mary was borne aloft by the Angels, whose Queen she was soon to be proclaimed. She reigns in Heaven with her divine Son and looks down in love and mercy on her exiled children, whom she is ever ready to assist. She was the humblest and most exalted

of creatures,¹ for when told that she was to be the Mother of God, she desired to be called His handmaid.

Humility is the Mother of all the virtues even as pride is the source of all the vices. If we wish to share in Mary's triumph, we must first of all share in her humility.

*Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, Jesus has said, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*² *God resists the proud, we are reminded by the Apostle James, but gives grace to the humble.*³ The glorious Assumption of Mary contains a lesson in humility for all of us.

¹ Dante, Par. XXXIII, 2.

² Luke 14, 11.

³ James 4, 6.

16th August

LAPSES INTO SIN

1. When we have spent many years fighting our evil inclinations, praying, and forming resolutions, it saddens us when we fall into grave sin once again. A lapse like this can be very discouraging and can make us feel that it is impossible to resist temptation. We may even feel that we are not destined by God to enjoy everlasting happiness. This is a very dangerous temptation which could lead us to ruin. It is part of the tactics of the devil to tempt us to sin and, when we have fallen, to persuade us that our fall was unavoidable and that we may as well resign ourselves to sinning because we are predestined to hell.

Predestination is a gigantic theological problem which has tormented the minds and consciences of many. It is a difficult question, but in practice it can be answered in a few words. It is certain that *God . . . wishes us all to be saved.*¹ It is certain that God became man and shed His precious blood for our salvation. How then could we be predestined to hell? How could we be denied the graces necessary for salvation? Our constant falls do not indicate that God has abandoned us, but show that we have

abandoned Him. If we sincerely do everything of which we are capable, God will not deny us His assistance.

2. Away, then, with all thoughts of discouragement. Let us ask humbly for forgiveness every time we fall, for God understands our weakness. Then let us begin again with confidence in God's grace.

But why, we may ask, does God permit us to fall time and time again without giving us the grace to resist? In such a case we must accept the mystery of God's dealings with us. God often allows us to fall in order to humble us and to make us realise that we are powerless without Him. Pride is often the cause of our sins, and our pride must be curbed. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*² Instead of giving in to discouragement, therefore, we should acknowledge our own weakness and pray again to God to help us.

3. There are other explanations for our repeated lapses into sin. Sometimes we do not resist temptation immediately and it takes root in our souls. We may neglect to pray for God's assistance. We may have neglected to avoid the occasions of sin and have played about with danger. We may not be sufficiently determined to make any sacrifice rather than commit sin.

Let us consider our lapses and we shall discover that they can be explained in one of these ways. There is no need to lose confidence in God, therefore. Rather should we renew our good resolutions and reinforce them by constant prayer. Nobody who prays continually can keep falling into sin.

¹ 1 Tim. 2, 4.

² Cf. James 4, 6.

17th August

RENOUNCING ALL THINGS

1. If we want God to take possession of our souls, we must drive out every inordinate affection to earthly things. It is not

possible for God to dwell within us if we are still attached to sin or preoccupied with worldly aims.

God should reign supreme in us and inspire all our desires and actions. This can never happen if we retain an attachment to deliberate sin, even if it is not grave sin. In the case of venial sin, it is not so much the sin which prevents God from ruling us absolutely as the attachment to sin.

It is possible for anybody to fall through human weakness, *for the just man falls seven times and rises again.*¹ It is when we remain willingly in the state of sin that we offend God and weaken our faith and charity. At such times it is as if Jesus were asleep within us, as He slept in the boat during the storm on the lake of Galilee, when the terrified Apostles cried out: *Lord, save us! We are perishing!*² We must keep ourselves free from all trace of sin if we wish to remain intimately united with God and to be governed only by Him.

2. Another necessary condition for Christ's reign in our souls is that we should destroy our love of self. Our Lord charged us: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*³ It is easier to renounce the goods of this world than it is to deny ourselves. It is so difficult to renounce one's own ego that at first sight it seems impossible. Nevertheless, God demands this of us if we intend to be perfect Christians and to be completely free to dedicate ourselves to Him.

God wishes to be absolute master of our souls because this is His right as our Creator and Redeemer. If we succeed in conquering our self-love and in desiring only whatever is pleasing to God, we shall find liberty and peace. We shall be able to claim with St. Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*⁴

3. Self-renunciation involves also the surrender of other attachments, such as the love of worldly honours, ambition, the desire for success, and many other affections which would hinder us from living the life of God. When we have arrived at a state of indifference to illness or health, wealth or poverty, life or

death, we shall be able to say that we have completely renounced self, because God alone will reign within us. When we have stripped ourselves of all alien affections, God will be our absolute Sovereign and we shall be really rich.

¹ Prov. 24, 16.

² Mt. 8, 25.

³ Mt. 16, 24.

18th August

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

1. We are drawn towards Heaven by a golden chain of grace. The most precious links in this chain of benefits are the Sacraments, which Jesus Christ instituted as sensible and efficacious signs of divine grace. When we are born, tainted by original sin and therefore deprived of supernatural grace, the Church purifies and regenerates us through the Sacrament of Baptism. We then become the adopted sons of God and heirs to the kingdom of Heaven.

When we are still children, we come to the use of reason and begin to experience our first temptations to evil. Left to itself our frail human nature is powerless to resist, but we are now fortified by the reception of another Sacrament, Confirmation, which makes us soldiers of Jesus Christ and provides us with spiritual weapons to combat the enemies of our soul.

Unfortunately, we continue to fall into sin from time to time, but the Sacrament of Penance is there to save us from ruin. Moreover, Christ has given us the Blessed Eucharist to keep us close to Him and to prevent us from falling more seriously.

Other Sacraments are Matrimony and Holy Orders. The former sanctifies the marriage bond and imparts the grace necessary to bring up a Christian family. The latter provides the Church with priests, representatives of our divine Redeemer who confer the supernatural life on souls and guide them towards

everlasting happiness. Finally, when we are nearing the end of our mortal life, Mother Church is again at our side to comfort us. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction wipes away all remaining traces of sin and gives us the strength to face the great journey into eternity.

We should be grateful to God for this chain of favours and should make careful use of them for our spiritual welfare.

2. Like the other Sacraments, Baptism is composed of a material and a spiritual element. The sensible outward sign produces the grace, or spiritual element, which it signifies. Since we are composed of body and soul, it is fitting that the Sacraments should also consist of this double element. Baptism, for example, being a spiritual cleansing of the soul, is conferred by the pouring of natural water accompanied by the sacramental words determined by Jesus Christ.

The Church adds its own ceremonial to the essential part of the Sacrament. By means of the exorcisms the devil is expelled, and the tongue is consecrated with the salt of wisdom to indicate that it should be the instrument of goodness. The body is sanctified by the oil and chrism so that it may always be the living temple of the Holy Spirit. The white garment symbolises the innocence which we ought to preserve for the rest of our lives, and the lighted candle stands for the faith and charity which ought always to inspire the soul.

All this is done for us before we are in a position to understand anything about it. Nevertheless, we should reflect today on the meaning of these sacred ceremonies and on how they should affect our lives.

3. It is helpful for us to repeat the baptismal vows which were once made by others in our name. Let us imagine that we are at our own Baptism, solemnly promising through our godfather and godmother to renounce the devil, the world and the flesh in order to follow Jesus.

Can we claim to have kept our promises? Or are we forced

to admit that we have not always lived up to our obligations:

Let us renew our promises today and let us ask Jesus for the grace to be faithful to them till the end of our lives.

19th August

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

I. The Book of Wisdom speaks to us of Divine Providence. *Your providence, O Father, guides . . .¹ You love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.² God . . . is the guide of Wisdom and the director of the wise. For both we and our words are in his hand . . .³ Wisdom reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well.⁴ The Lord of all shows no partiality . . . because he himself made the great as well as the small, and he provides for all alike.⁵ You have disposed all things by measure and number and weight.⁶*

We have only to look around us and to think about ourselves in order to understand the truth of these words from Sacred Scripture. We need only consider a few of the outstanding elements in the universe—the sun which rises and sets with such perfect regularity and the myriads of stars, clusters of planets and solar systems, ranging the vast spaces of the firmament. Then there are the smaller objects of creation which none the less proclaim the greatness of Divine Providence—from the invisibly tiny insects, each with its own independent existence, to the flowers which draw their nourishment from the earth and the birds for whose sustenance God provides all that is necessary.

Lastly, there is the human body, that masterpiece of harmony. The eyes, ears, and other organs display in a marvellous manner the wisdom of their Creator. The soul, too, is the living image of God. It transcends the limits of space and time by the speed

of its thought, continually discovers new secrets of the universe by means of its intellectual power, and is capable of willing, commanding and loving.

When confronted with so much order of beauty and goodness, we can only bow down and adore the Providence of God.

2. How can we reconcile with this concept of Divine Providence the confusion and injustice which also exist in the world? Why does God sometimes permit the evil to prosper and the good to be oppressed? Why does He not crush iniquity as soon as it raises its head, instead of allowing the wicked to enjoy the pleasures of this earth while the good are suffering?

The designs of God are hidden and mysterious, but it is certain that He arranges everything justly and for the best. God never hurries, for He contemplates all creatures and events in the light of eternity. The devil may hurry, *knowing that he has but a short time*,⁷ but God is the master of time.

God waits for men at the last threshold of life in order to do justice to them all. His patience and mercy endure until the final moment of death, because He has said: *I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*.⁸ This is the mystery of God's mercy.

St. Augustine offers another explanation as to why evil men often seem to be happy and victorious in this world. His suggestion is quite frightening. Even the worst of men, he says, do a certain amount of good during life. Nevertheless, if they die unrepentant, they will be punished for all eternity. Therefore the justice of God concedes to them a small reward in this life for any good which they may have accomplished.

3. How foolish it is for the sinner to exult and to sink into complacency. For all he knows, he may be already abandoned by God because the measure of God's mercy to him has been exhausted.

Those who are leading good lives may have to endure a great deal, but *blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted*,

and blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁹

Even in the moral order Divine Providence stands out quite clearly, being infinitely good to the just and merciful to sinners, but severely condemning all sinfulness. Let us meditate on the wonders of Providence and regulate our lives in accordance with its designs.

¹ Wisdom 14, 3.

² Wisdom 11, 24.

³ Wisdom 7, 16.

⁴ Wisdom 8, 1.

⁵ Wisdom 6, 8.

⁶ Wisdom 11, 21.

⁷ Apoc. 12, 12.

⁸ Cf. Ez. 33, 11.

⁹ Cf. Mt. 5, 10.

20th August

CONFIDENCE IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

1. Sometimes we grow discouraged and lose confidence in God. This may be the result of sickness, or of misfortune, or of misunderstanding on the part of others. At any rate, on such occasions we may feel as if we have been forgotten by God.

Jesus Christ willed to endure a trial of this nature when He was hanging upon the Cross, derided and jeered at by those whom He had come to redeem. *My God, my God*, He cried, *why hast thou forsaken me?*¹ In the Garden of Gethsemane, however, He had already seen in a terrifying vision the sins and acts of ingratitude of the human race. He had begged His Father to take away from Him the chalice of suffering which had been offered to Him, but He had added immediately: *Yet not my will but thine be done.*²

We must behave in the same manner. Whether it is a physical or moral anguish which torments us, we must gaze upon the Crucifix and remember that Jesus suffered much more in obedience to the will of His heavenly Father. We must never lack confidence in Divine Providence and resignation to the will

of God. In the mysterious designs of God for us, this evil which we experience is intended for our own good. It may have been sent to ennoble us or to purify us or to give us an opportunity of making reparation for our sins.

God has endowed suffering with a very purposeful mission in the world. It should have the effect of making us detached from earthly things and more preoccupied with spiritual matters. Let us trust in God, then, and remember the words of the Holy Spirit: *Has anyone hoped in the Lord and been disappointed?*³

We are in God's hands and He knows what He is doing. One day we shall see how the sufferings of this mortal life have been designed for our true welfare.

2. An excessive preoccupation with worldly affairs may often be responsible for our lack of perfect confidence in God. We worry about tomorrow, and about our many material needs. But Jesus has warned us about this. *Do not be anxious for your life, He said, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on . . . Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? . . . Consider 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. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which flourishes today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you of little faith! Therefore do not be anxious . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*⁴ *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's leave. But as for you, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not be afraid.*⁵

3. God does not forbid us, naturally, to work and to provide for the future. But He condemns such immoderate anxiety as would tend to distract our attention from our spiritual obligations. We

should be occupied, certainly, but never preoccupied. We should always have perfect confidence in God and resignation to His will.

¹ Mt. 27, 46.

² Luke 22, 62.

³ Ecclus. 2, 10.

⁴ Cf. Mt. 6, 25-34.

⁵ Cf. Mt. 10, 29-31.

21st August

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

I. *Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?*¹ asks the Book of Job. In fact, man's life is a constant battle against evil. This struggle commences as soon as we reach the use of reason, when we begin to understand the difference between good and evil and feel the first strong impulses to commit sin. These sinful impulses can be controlled by the practice of virtue and by the grace of God, but we shall never be entirely free of them. Even St. Paul, although he had reached the highest peak of sanctity and had even experienced for a few moments something of the joys of Heaven, has to acknowledge that this is so in his own case. *I see another law, he says, warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*²

In this struggle against evil we are assisted by the grace of God. This grace makes us soldiers of Jesus Christ, strengthens our faith and helps us to do good. It is conferred upon us in a special manner in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Let us meditate on the enlightening words used by the Sacred Minister when he is conferring this Sacrament. "Almighty and eternal God, Who in thy kindness hast given to these thy servants a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, and granted to them remission of all their sins; send forth from heaven upon them Thy sevenfold Spirit, the Holy Paraclete. Amen. The Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Amen. The Spirit of counsel and fortitude. Amen. The Spirit of knowledge and piety. Amen.

Mercifully fill them with the Spirit of Thy fear, and seal them with the sign of the cross of Christ, that they may obtain everlasting life."³

2. The sacramental grace which was infused into our souls along with the gifts of the Holy Spirit imposes certain obligations upon us. We are to be soldiers of Christ and should hold aloft the standard of our faith. We should never be ashamed to be known as Christians either in private or in public. We must cast aside that human respect which can prevent Christians from openly professing their faith. There should be no conflict, in other words, between the convictions which we hold in private and those which we acknowledge in public. Let us examine ourselves on this point and rely on the graces which we received in the Sacrament of Confirmation to strengthen our good resolutions.

3. As well as being brave soldiers of Christ in the profession of our faith, we should be equally so in our actions. It is God's will that we should always have to co-operate with His grace by our own deeds. *By the grace of God*, writes St. Paul, *I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been fruitless—in fact, I have laboured more than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*⁴

We can do nothing on our own, but with the grace of God anything is possible to us. The Sacrament of Confirmation obliges us to work strenuously and constantly in collaboration with God. There may be grave temptations to be conquered, difficulties to be overcome, and sufferings to be endured; but with the grace of God we can do anything. To quote St. Paul again, *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*⁵

¹ Job. 7, 1.² Rom. 7, 23-25.³ Rit. Rom.⁴ Cf. I Cor. 15, 10.⁵ Phil. 4, 13.

22nd August

THE SUREST WAY TO AVOID SIN

I. The surest way of never offending God is to love Him. If we love God sincerely, it will be impossible for us to offend

Him. *Love*, says St. Paul, *is the fulfilment of the Law*,¹ and *charity is the bond of perfection*.² If all our actions are inspired by the love of God, it will not matter how insignificant they are, for they will be pleasing to Him and will gain merit for ourselves. Then it will be impossible for us to sin.

If most of our actions, on the other hand, are dictated by an inordinate attachment to creatures and to ourselves, they will certainly not lead us to God. Our hearts need love and cannot live without it. But whom shall we love if we do not love God, Who is our Creator and Redeemer? We shall find love for a moment in beauty, in goodness, and in pleasure, but it will soon pass away and leave us with empty hearts. God is our highest good and only He can fully satisfy our hearts. But He wishes us to belong completely to Himself.

Our hearts are too tiny to be divided between God and creatures. We must belong entirely to God. If we love Him sincerely all created things will form a ladder which will help us to ascend to Him. Let us love God and remain united to Him in all our actions. Then sin will never find its way into our souls.

2. Another way of making sure that we shall never offend God is to love our neighbour. *Love does not evil to a neighbour*,³ St. Paul assures us. We are told that when St. John the Apostle was too old to be able to preach long sermons and had to be carried in to speak to his congregation, he was accustomed to repeat the same brief message: "Little children, love one another." One day the faithful, who had grown tired of hearing the same phrase so often, asked him to say something else to them. "But this is God's command," St. John replied, "and if you obey it, that will be sufficient."

If we loved our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God, we could never sin. We could never be guilty of injustice, calumny, or indifference to the misfortunes of others. Rather should we be kind, compassionate and ready to help our fellow-men in their spiritual and temporal needs. Let us examine

ourselves on the extent of our fraternal charity and let us resolve to see the person of Jesus Christ in our neighbour.

3. The third defence against sin is a spirit of prayer. A man who is constantly close to God cannot offend Him. The spirit of prayer keeps a man in supernatural contact with God. As in an electric current, when the contact is interrupted, the light goes out. If we wish to receive light from God, we must remain in contact with Him.

Christ told His disciples that *they must always pray and not lose heart*,⁴ and St. Paul explains how we can always pray. *Whatever you do in word or in work, he says, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*.⁵ In this sense, therefore, all work becomes prayer, and since we are constantly praying we cannot offend God.

¹ Rom. 13, 10.

² Col. 3, 14.

³ Rom. 13, 10.

⁴ Luke 18, 1.

⁵ Col. 3, 17.

23rd August

HOLY VIATICUM

1. When the prophet Elias was afraid and discouraged because the chosen people had abandoned God and slain all the other prophets, he fled into the desert. One day he was tired and dejected and lay down to sleep in the shade of a juniper tree. He was awakened suddenly by an Angel of the Lord who showed him on two successive occasions a hearth cake which he pressed him to eat. The prophet ate and drank *and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God*.¹

Some commentators see in this bread which Elias ate an image of the Blessed Eucharist, and in his journey to the mount of God our own voyage through life to eternity. Sometimes we also feel tired along the way and it seems to us that God has abandoned

us. Often we are troubled and sorrowful, humbled by our many lapses into sin, despairing of ever becoming holy. On such occasions, like Elias, we need nourishment, the nourishment of the Blessed Eucharist. This spiritual food, which contains the real living Jesus, the author of grace, is all that can give us the courage and strength to continue our journey and to overcome the obstacles which we encounter on the way. Let us have frequent recourse to this wonderful means of sustenance, through which Jesus supplies us with the supernatural strength which we need. Then we shall be able to repeat the words of St. Paul: *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*²

2. Although the Holy Eucharist sustains us throughout life's journey, we need it most of all when we are nearing the end and are at last in sight of our heavenly home.

Men can do no more for us in these final moments. Our friends, if we have any left, will have nothing to give us except their affection. The doctors will have abandoned us once we have passed the stage where medical aid is of any use to us. Life will have become an elusive memory, a sad memory if it recalls a long succession of sins, but consoling if it reminds us of good deeds and acts of mortification.

As a general rule, a dying man experiences a longing for some kind of assistance. Our yearning will be satisfied if it is our privilege to receive in our final moments the divine Healer who is also our Saviour and Redeemer. Since death can seize us unawares, however, we cannot depend too much on this last consolation. Whenever we receive Holy Communion, we should ask Jesus not to deprive us of Holy Viaticum at the hour of death.

3. If we wish to have Jesus to assist us in our last battle against temptation, let us receive Him as often as possible in Holy Communion with the same fervour with which we should like to receive Him in our final agony. Then we may hope that our long fidelity will be crowned by the grace of Viaticum. How wonderful it will be if at the close of life we can clasp Jesus to

our hearts and tell Him that we have always loved Him, or at the very least that we have always done our best to love and serve Him.

¹ Cf. 3 Kings 19, 4-8.

² Phil. 4, 13.

24th August

EXTREME UNCTION

1. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction is the final link in the chain of favours with which our lives are girdled. It heals the wounds which sin has left in us, confers grace upon the soul, and can even restore the health of the body if this coincides with our spiritual welfare. *Is any one among you sick?* asks St. James. *Let him bring in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.*¹

Extreme Unction is a Sacrament of the living and should therefore be received in the state of grace. If for some grave reason, however, it is impossible for the sick man to make his Confession, he can make, as far as is possible, an act of perfect contrition and receive this Sacrament. In this case Extreme Unction can remit even the mortal sins which he is unable to confess. Of itself, however, this Sacrament increases sanctifying grace in the soul, pardons venial sins, remits the temporal punishment due to sins which have already been forgiven, and removes the evil inclinations and weakness of will which are the result of sin. It enables the soul, moreover, to endure suffering and temptation and to await death with calmness and resignation. We should be deeply grateful to God for deigning to comfort and assist us in our final trial.

2. We need not be afraid of the Sacrament of Extreme

Unction, regarding it as if it were the herald of death. It is, in fact, the harbinger of life. It gives us the supernatural life of grace, and if God in His goodness judges it to be conducive to our spiritual welfare, it restores our corporal life as well. When we are seriously ill, we should desire and demand to receive this Sacrament rather than wait until it is too late. It is not a fatal poison, but a very precious gift from God.

As long as we live, we should pray to God not to deprive us of this final gift of His infinite mercy. It is a comforting thought that when everyone else will have deserted us, our Lord will come to assuage our suffering and to help us with His grace on our great journey into eternity.

3. We should remember that this Sacrament imposes on us a very grave obligation. In modern times many people neglect to advise their relations and friends to receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction when they see that they are dangerously ill. Their motive is one of false pity, for they are afraid to scare their loved ones. They postpone the administration of the Last Sacraments until the patient is unconscious and can no longer receive them with the proper dispositions.

It is wise to remember that those who are responsible for their relations not receiving the Last Sacraments in good time are guilty of grave sin. It is a dreadful responsibility to assume before God and before the souls of those dear ones who could well be damned for ever as a result of their neglect.

¹ James 5, 14-15.

25th August

PRIDE IS ROBBERY

1. When we are proud, we steal from God. Everything which we are and have, both in the natural and supernatural order, is

a gift from God. Therefore, when we claim the credit for ourselves, we take from Him that which really belongs to Him. *What hast thou that thou hast not received?* asks St. Paul. *And if thou hast received it why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?*¹

Pride is a very grave sin, therefore. According to Sacred Scripture, *pride is the reservoir of sin, a source which runs over with vice.*² *The beginning of pride,* says the same Book of Ecclesiasticus, *is man's stubbornness in withdrawing his heart from his Maker.*³ It is worth meditating on these words, for because of this sin *God sends unheard-of afflictions and brings men to utter ruin.*⁴ As St. Augustine points out, the first sin was one of pride, and it changed an angel into a demon.⁵

When we reflect on the matter, it becomes quite clear that pride is the basis of every sin.⁶ When a man disobeys the law of God, he prefers sin to God. Sin, therefore, is always an act of rebellion against God. It is as if we were to say to Him: "I prefer to obey my own caprice rather than to obey Your will." In this sense it is true to state that every sin is founded on pride and involves a turning away from God. But when we turn away from our Creator and Redeemer, where are we to go? *Lord, let us say with St. Peter, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life . . .*⁷

2. With the exception of our Blessed Lady and the Saints, all men are more or less proud. Pride employs many subtle strata-gems in order to insinuate itself into our hearts. Very often it does not take the form of an open revolt against God, like that of Lucifer, but expresses itself in a sense of self-complacency, which feeds on the praise and adulation of others. We forget that it was God Who gave us whatever talents we possess. If we have achieved any kind of success or have accomplished anything good in the world, we forget that we have been dependent upon God for our very existence as well as for our power to act.

We believe that we are important, whereas we are as nothing

before the infinite majesty of God and before the immensity of His universe. Let us be humble, therefore. If we wish to be raised up by God, let us abase ourselves in the sight of Him who resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Only then shall we be able to perform actions worthy of everlasting life.

3. In order to combat human pride, God humbled Himself.⁸ Not only did He assume a human nature like ours, but He was born poor and lowly and willed to die upon the Cross as a condemned criminal. What a tremendous lesson for human pride! God gave us Himself as an example to be imitated: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*⁹ If we do not learn from this great lesson in humility, we shall never make any progress in the way of Christian perfection. Nothing, says St. Augustine, is a greater barrier to perfection than pride.¹⁰ We must take care to lay the foundation stone of humility, therefore, before we can begin to build the edifice of Christian perfection.

¹ 1 Cor. 4, 7.

² Eccus. 10, 15.

³ Eccus. 10, 14.

⁴ Eccus. 10, 15.

⁵ In Ps. 18, 15.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John 6, 69.

⁸ In. Ps. 18, 15.

⁹ Mt. 11, 29.

¹⁰ In Ps. 18, 15.

26th August

TWO PATHS TO HEAVEN

1. The first road to Heaven is the way of innocence. There are some generous souls who preserve till the end of life their original baptismal purity. St. Aloysius Gonzaga never ceased to repent of two small faults for which he could hardly be held responsible since he committed them in the ignorance of early childhood. Having lived like an angel in human form, he died with a smile on his lips murmuring that he was happy to be going to Heaven at last.

In more recent times there was the lovable boy saint, Dominic

Savio. On the day of his first Holy Communion he made the resolution "Death rather than sin," a resolution to which he remained faithful throughout his innocent young life.

Throughout its history the Church could boast of many other members like these who reflected the absolute purity and perfection of its divine Head and Founder. It should be our desire to possess this innocence, so that we may be pure and holy in the sight of God and may remain always close to Him. Sin is ugly. It deprives us of God, our only true good, and makes us unhappy, because the sinner can never be at peace. It makes us restless and remorseful during life, and when we come to die, unless God's mercy intervenes, it causes us to despair of salvation. Let us jealously guard our state of innocence, keeping it intact by fervent prayer and meditation.

2. If we have been unfortunate enough to have lost our baptismal innocence by falling into sin, we should not be discouraged. God's mercy opens another way for us, the way of penance. *I have come, Jesus tells us, to call sinners, not the just.*¹

Our divine Redeemer foresaw in the Garden of Gethsemane all our sins and acts of ingratitude. Nevertheless, He offered Himself as a victim of expiation on our behalf, and shed His Precious Blood upon the Cross for our redemption. How would it be possible for Him to refuse to forgive us? How could He not long to save us in spite of our sins? Let us recall the consoling parables of the prodigal son and the lost sheep. If we feel that we fall into the category of prodigal sons or lost sheep, then let us turn to Jesus for forgiveness.

3. This second path to Heaven, however, demands sacrifice on our part. Our repentance must be practical and supernatural. It should lead us to confess our sins in the Sacrament of Penance and to regain God's friendship in Holy Communion. After that our way must be one of self-mortification: *Unless you repent, Jesus warns us, you will all perish.*²

The first penance which we must perform is to offer to God all the physical and moral sufferings which are in store for us during life and at the hour of death. Then we must add our own voluntary acts of self-denial. The generosity of the Saints in this regard was rewarded by the lasting friendship of God. As for ourselves, we should remember that Jesus Himself has warned us that we shall be lost if we neglect to do penance.³

¹ Mt. 9, 13.² Luke 13, 5.³ Ibid.

27th August

THOSE WHO WILL TO BE DAMNED

1. There are many who are so steeped in vice that they never think of eternity and seek their happiness in sinful and worldly pleasures. They have grown deaf to God's voice, although He instils in them remorse and restlessness and invites them by good inspirations to return to His merciful embrace. They are deaf, too, to the voice of conscience, which in spite of their degradation cannot fail to make them feel the attractiveness of virtue and their great need of their Creator. They are fundamentally unhappy, doubly so because in this life *there is no peace to the wicked*¹ and in the next life they will be damned for ever. Only a miracle of divine grace can save them from the abyss into which they have voluntarily precipitated themselves.

There are others who want to have their heaven both in this world and in the next. They oscillate uncertainly between good and evil, today being full of good resolutions and tomorrow giving way to sin because virtue seems to demand too many sacrifices. They would like to be good, but they will not take the necessary trouble. Indecisive and lukewarm, they think that

they can serve God and the devil at the same time. Naturally, this is impossible, as Christ has told us. *No man can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and mammon.*² If people of this kind will not make up their minds, they are running the risk of eternal damnation.

To what category do you belong? Think about this and make a firm decision.

2. Only those who will it themselves are damned. God wishes all men to be saved. It was for this that He came into the world and shed His Precious Blood. Moreover, He has given us the means necessary for salvation. *God our Saviour wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*³

What can be wanting to us, therefore, in order to obtain salvation? Divine grace is certainly not lacking, for God gives it to us without reserve. *I come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.*⁴ Nor are we lacking in strength for as St. Paul says, *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*⁵ We have the Sacraments, good inspirations, and the example of the Saints. All that we can be deficient in, then, is our own goodwill and co-operation with the grace of God. We must be prepared to play our part in our own salvation.

3. We cannot claim that we are too weak to fight our temptations. *God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength.*⁶ Neither can we complain that we have not enough time to think about such matters, for when God gave us time He intended us to devote it principally to the solution of the most important problem in our lives, which is our own salvation. It is futile, too, to insist that the devil is too strong for us, for, to quote St. Augustine, he is like a chained mastiff which can bark at us with all his might, but cannot bite us unless we approach too close to him.

Our first thought and purpose, therefore, must be our own salvation. The treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price⁷ are symbols of the kingdom of God and of everlasting

happiness. We should be prepared to sacrifice everything else in order to find this treasure and to acquire this pearl.

¹ Is. 48, 22.² Mt. 6, 24.³ I Tim. 2, 4.⁴ John 10, 10.⁵ Phil. 4, 13.⁶ I Cor. 10, 13.⁷ Cf. Mt. 13, 44-46.

28th August

THE SONS OF GOD

1. In the beginning of his Gospel St. John speaks of the eternal nature of the Son of God, the Word through Whom all things were created and Who became man to enlighten and redeem the world which was wallowing in ignorance and sin. Unfortunately, he adds, instead of welcoming Him the world rejected Him, but he goes on to say that *to as many as received him he gave the power of becoming Sons of God*.¹ These words are a summary of the history of Christianity, and indeed of the human race, for Jesus Christ was to be *a sign that shall be contradicted*.² On one side there have always been the children of the world, those who ignore or openly combat Christ; on the other, the children of God, the thousands who acknowledge Christ as the hope of salvation and the light of the world, and adore and love Him as God.

To which side do I belong? Perhaps I am convinced that I have never attacked or rejected Christ. But, in effect, I did so every time I committed a deliberate sin, for I put my own caprice before His will. God's grace in me was weakened by venial sin, or extinguished altogether by mortal sin. As a result, I ceased to be a child of God, and became a child of Satan. In losing Jesus I forfeited all real happiness in this world and in the next.

2. We are, or ought to be, sons of God. We are His adopted sons by means of the grace which gives us a share in his divine life. This idea is contained even in the Old Testament. *You are gods, all of you sons of the Most High*.³ *The Spirit himself*, explains

St. Paul, *gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God. But if we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ.*⁴

In other words, the grace of God transforms us and makes us His adopted sons. The supernatural life is grafted on to the soul, bringing forth a new man who is capable of actions which will deserve an everlasting reward. We must not allow the old tree, with its dead branches and barren fruit, to spring up again within us; the old man with his defects and evil inclinations must remain dead.

If God's life is extinguished in us, we shall cease to be His heirs and co-heirs with Christ. We shall be incapable of doing anything good and shall be destined to eternal damnation.

3. If we wish to increase in ourselves the divine life of grace which makes us children of God, we must struggle against our sinful inclinations and cultivate the different virtues. Our lives must be a continuous ascent towards perfection and towards God. We must not be led astray by the passing attractions of the world. Worldly glory and success resemble the coloured balloons which are the delight of children as they rise up towards the sky, but which soon float back to earth when they have been emptied of air.

It is only by our efforts to achieve Christian perfection that we can become true children of God. Then we shall experience a little happiness on earth and shall be happy for ever in Heaven.

¹ Cf. John I, 1-12.

² Luke 2, 34.

³ Ps. 81, 6.

⁴ Rom. 8, 16-17.

29th August

THE INTERIOR LIFE

1. Human life is threefold. First, there is the physical life, that is, the life of the body animated by the soul. Then there is the intellectual life, through which the soul searches for truth and controls the powers of the body. Finally, there is the supernatural

life, which leads us towards Christian perfection and unites us to God, the source of goodness and happiness.

These three levels of life are all good in themselves, but form a hierarchy in which the primacy is held by the spiritual life. Physical life is a gift from God, but must remain subordinate to the spiritual life. If it were given precedence over reason and over the natural and divine law, our proper scale of values would be upset and we should fall prey to a host of sinful inclinations. The same applies to the intellectual life. God endowed us with intelligence to enable us to know the truth, explore the secrets of the universe, and use them for our own welfare. If the intellect fails to ascend to the knowledge of God from its knowledge of worldly objects and ceases to be inspired by a high regard for virtue, its achievements can lead eventually to death and destruction.

The supernatural life, which is nourished by divine grace; perfects man. All our physical powers and spiritual faculties should be dominated by this life, which Jesus Christ came into the world to bring to us. We can have this life if we obey His commands, control our passions, pray fervently, resign ourselves to His will, and perform all our actions for love of Him.

2. The daily struggle for existence gradually wears down both the physical and the intellectual life. The same can happen to the supernatural life. The long process of self-denial, acceptance of crosses, and efforts to achieve perfection, can be very difficult and very tiring. Often we feel weary and discouraged, but on these occasions we must recall the words of Jesus. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*¹ *Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*²

3. Let us go to Jesus when we are worn out by conflict and have no strength left. Let us go to Him when we feel that we can walk no farther along the stony path to perfection. He will help us and restore our courage; He will grant us an increase of grace, which is the source of the spiritual life.

It is essential, however, that we should have a spirit of recollection. If we are dissipated, we shall be unable to hear the voice of God. We must speak with God and open our hearts to Him; we must tell Him that we love Him and wish to learn to love Him more and to conform more completely to His designs for us. Then we shall find peace and contentment in the interior life such as the world can neither know nor communicate.

¹ John 14, 6.

² Mt. 11, 28.

30th August

PERSEVERANCE

1. *He who has persevered to the end, Jesus tells us, will be saved.*¹ Elsewhere He says that *no one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*² It is necessary, therefore, to persevere in goodness if we wish to be saved.

It is easy to begin, but it is difficult to continue. In a moment of fervour, perhaps, you promised to become holy. Maybe some misfortune came your way, such as the loss of someone very dear to you, and you were moved to meditate upon the vanity of earthly things and promised to dedicate yourself entirely to God. In that moment you experienced the truth of the words of Ecclesiastes, summarised in the *Imitation of Christ*: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, but to love God and serve Him alone."³

Unfortunately, your good resolutions wore away with time. You may have been swept away once more by the deceptive pleasures of this world. Or perhaps your charity grew cold and in your tepidity you gave in to the violent onslaught of temptation.

Christian perseverance has three main enemies. (1) Firstly, there is time, which slowly consumes this virtue. You must conquer time by resolving to begin the battle anew every morning of your life. (2) Then there is the devil, who goes about, as St. Peter

warns us, like a lion in search of his prey.⁴ You must resist him by the strength of your faith. (3) Finally, there is spiritual sloth, which easily invades the soul. You must take your cue from St. Paul's exhortation: *My beloved brethren, be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*⁵

2. Perseverance may be a difficult virtue, but nothing is really difficult to a man of strong resolution. When the sister of St. Thomas Aquinas asked him how to become holy, he replied that it needed only one thing—a firm act of the will, for God will certainly supply the necessary grace. Think of how much work and sacrifice is required to achieve worldly success. Cicero wrote that it required constant and tireless labour in order to become a great orator.⁶ St. Paul cited the example of athletes who are prepared to make such great sacrifices in order to train themselves to win. If they are prepared to do so much to gain a perishable crown, he comments, we should be prepared to do much more to gain an imperishable one.⁷

3. The grace of God is the principal weapon upon which we must depend in order to gain our victory. We should pray for it humbly and perseveringly. There will be victors and losers in the battle for Heaven as well as in earthly contests. We must make sure that we are on the winning side. For this purpose we should combine fervent and constant prayer with generous co-operation with the grace of God.

¹ Mt. 10, 22; 24, 13.

² Cf. Luke 9, 62.

³ Bk. I, c. I, 4.

⁴ Cf. I Peter 5, 8-9.

⁵ I Cor. 15, 58.

⁶ Cf. De Orat., I, 39.

⁷ Cf. I Cor. 9, 25.

31st August

PATIENCE

I. Patience may be external or internal. Both are necessary aspects of the same virtue. External patience consists in refraining

from outbursts of anger and from sarcastic comments—in short, from all words and actions which might give offence to others. It is easy to be patient when our affairs are running smoothly and everybody is being nice to us. It is quite another matter when we come up against difficulties or find that we are being slighted or insulted. It is hard to remain silent when our pride has been wounded, and it requires the virtue of a saint to be able to smile at our tormentors. It took St. Francis de Sales years of spiritual conflict before he achieved this kind of perfection.

How far can we claim to have succeeded in acquiring this virtue? We should always remember that temperamental explosions are unworthy of a rational being. The only proper course when we have been offended is to state our case clearly and calmly, though generally speaking it is more heroic to remain silent. Impatience is futile because it cannot remedy the situation, and often harmful because it upsets us and only produces bitterness. Acts of impatience, moreover, are a source of bad example to others. *The quick-tempered man*, says Sacred Scripture, *makes a fool of himself*.¹ *The patient man*, it adds, *shows much good sense, but the quick-tempered man displays folly at its height*.²

If we live in the presence of God, we shall learn to be calm and self-controlled in all circumstances.

2. An outward show of patience will hardly avail us much in God's eyes unless it is accompanied by interior patience, which consists in the possession of complete mastery over all our faculties. We should be able to control our feelings as well as our actions. This is a difficult virtue, but it is the duty of every sincere Christian to try and acquire it. Only the grace of God and constant effort will enable us to succeed, but when we have at last mastered our unruly and selfish impulses we shall have arrived at a state of peace and perfection. *By your patience you will win your souls*.³

3. If we are patient from the motive of the love of God, we can gain great merit in His sight. There are three grades of

perfection in this virtue. (1) The first is the acceptance, with Christian resignation, of every kind of misfortune, offering it in expiation of our sins. (2) The second consists in a cheerful and willing acceptance of these misfortunes because they come from God. (3) The third stage is reached when we actually desire them out of our love for Jesus Christ.

Which grade have we attained? If we wish to please God, it is essential that we should have made the first grade at least. *A patient man is better than a warrior, and he who rules his temper, than he who takes a city.*⁴

¹ Prov. 14, 17.

² Id. 14, 19.

³ Luke 21, 19.

⁴ Prov. 16, 32.

SEPTEMBER

1st September

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

1. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Anti-Christ, *the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, who opposes and is exalted above all that is called God . . . Already, he says, the mystery of iniquity is at work.*¹ From the beginning of the Church's history until the present time it has always been the same.

There always have been and always will be men who do evil not from human weakness, but from motives of malice so diabolical as to present something of a mystery to us. These can be called Anti-Christ because they seem to be incarnations of the devil, the spirit of iniquity. They delight in spreading error, in corrupting minds, and in persecuting the Church. They are steeped in all kinds of baseness and nothing pleases them better than to succeed in inducing the young and the innocent to follow them in their sinful ways. For this purpose they employ all the advantages which modern technical progress has to offer—the press, the cinema, the radio, and television. In short, they use God's gifts in their commercialisation of sin in order to draw souls away from Him.

The realisation of this terrifying fact provokes two questions. (1) How can such evil be permitted by God, Who made man for Himself and redeemed him with the Blood of His only-begotten Son? (2) What steps can we take to control this alarming and universal deluge of evil?

2. St. Augustine answers the first question by pointing out that the infinite and good God created us without any assistance from

ourselves, but does not will to save us without our co-operation since He has endowed us with the gift of liberty. Moreover, He prefers to draw good from evil rather than to prevent the evil itself. We must answer the second question ourselves, remembering that we have a serious obligation to combat evil in ourselves and in our fellow-men. What have we done up to now and what do we propose to do in the future?

3. According to St. Augustine, great good can come from the evil which God permits. In the first place, God displays His infinite goodness and mercy. Even though He permits us to offend Him out of respect for our human liberty, He is always ready to forgive us, even as He forgave the penitent thief. In the second place, by permitting evil, God gives the good an opportunity of practising virtue, especially the virtue of patience. If there were no persecutors, there would be no martyrs and the Church would be deprived of the glory which makes her most like her founder, Jesus Christ. Finally, each of us has a particular duty to fulfil in resisting the onslaught of evil. As followers and soldiers of Christ, we cannot remain passive. The invasion by the forces of evil demands a counter-attack by the forces of good in defence of the faith and of the Church. As Christians, we are the sons of martyrs. We must not refuse, therefore, to make our lives a continuous martyrdom for the triumph of goodness in ourselves and in others. The faithful exercise of virtue and of the apostolate is often a form of martyrdom.

¹ Cf. 2 Thess. 2, 3-7.

2nd September

INTIMACY WITH JESUS

1. In his memoirs written while in exile, Napoleon says: "Many have desired and endeavoured to be obeyed, revered

and honoured by men and nations. But nobody has ever sought to be loved by all; only Jesus Christ has demanded this, because He is God." *As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you*, we read in the Gospel of St. John. *Abide in my love.*¹ Jesus therefore asks each of us not only to love Him but to remain intimately united with Him in love. He has a perfect right to demand this, because as God He is our Creator, and as God-Man He is our Redeemer, Who out of love for us has given Himself entirely.

2. The union of love which should exist between Jesus and us is modelled on the mysterious union between Him and His heavenly Father. (1) This intimacy between us and Jesus should be first of all in the *mind*. Our thoughts will be good when we think like God, and with the mind of Jesus, Who is *the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.*² If we stray away from that light, darkness overwhelms us even as it pervaded the earth during the agony of Jesus Christ. Our intelligence is a ray of light which comes from God; we should take care not to allow this ray to be separated from its divine source. This heavenly ray always shone on the faces of the saints, because they were clean of heart and close to God. That is how we should all be. (2) In the second place, we should be united intimately with Jesus in our *sentiments*. *Have this mind in you which was also in Jesus Christ,*³ says St. Paul. Our love must not be abstract or partial, but must be all-absorbing. Jesus calls us friends,⁴ and friendship unites two hearts as one. We must give ourselves completely to Jesus without reserving anything for ourselves. True holiness is found when God and man are united like two faithful, constant friends. (3) In the third place, there must be intimacy in *action*. It is not possible for a man who truly loves God to do anything which would offend Him. Jesus compares the love which we should have for Him with the love which He has for His heavenly Father, so we should model our lives continuously on the life of Jesus. Jesus must work in us, as He did in St. Paul and in all the Saints.

St. Francis de Sales writes that Jesus should always be in our minds, in our hearts, in our eyes, and on our tongue. We should be living images of Jesus; and we must therefore live and act for Him, with Him, and in Him.

3. Do not imagine that this intimate union of the human heart with that of Jesus is the privilege and vocation of a few, that is, something reserved for priests, religious, mystics, and saints. Do we think that this privilege is only for saints? But we must all be saints. *You shall be holy, because I am holy.*⁵ *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*⁶ This does not mean that we all have the same vocation and that we should all be priests or religious. Sanctity is nothing other than this intimate, loving, and active union with Jesus. It must be practised in different ways in accordance with the positions which men occupy. For one it will be the sanctity of the workman, for another the sanctity of the student or of the clerk, of the professor or of the statesman, because the duties of each differ. But all must renounce their evil inclinations and their personal egoism. They must also, as the Gospel insists, renounce themselves in order to have the life of Jesus. They must love God above all things and also more than themselves, and they must love their neighbour as themselves. The goal is certainly hard and difficult; but if at present we are not able to reach it, we must at least have the strong and active desire to strive for it.

¹ John 15, 9.

² John 1, 9.

³ Phil. 2, 5.

⁴ John 15, 15.

⁵ 1 Peter 1, 16.

⁶ Mt. 5, 48.

3rd September

THE ANNUAL RETREAT

1. It is useful, one might say necessary, to spend some time now and again with God in meditation on the eternal truths.

It is too easy to become dissipated by contact with the many worldly things which distract us from our final end, which is God, and from the sanctification of our souls. With dissipation comes carelessness, spiritual lethargy, and tepidity; and we know that tepidity eventually leads us to commit sin. A retreat is one of the best ways of recollecting ourselves and of renewing our spiritual energies. It should not be thought that retreats are suitable only for priests and religious. They are suitable and even necessary for all of us, because we are all in need of recollection and of a new impetus towards holiness, which should be our common goal.

An annual retreat, therefore, should be the aim of all the faithful, even of the laity. Sometimes we are disgusted and frightened by the desolate spectacle which the world presents. Faith has grown weak; religious indifference is invading all sections of society, the forces of progress have achieved an almost universal and soul-destroying corruption of morals. How has this happened? We get the answer from the prophet Jeremias, who laments that in the supreme moment of trial, the chosen people abandoned God. *With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart.*¹

Let us resolve not to neglect this great means of sanctification. If possible, let us make a retreat every year.

2. In this matter, too, Jesus has set us an example. Before beginning His public life, He retired into the desert for forty days to fast and pray. It is when we are silent that God speaks to our hearts. When we are confused by the bustle of the world, it is hard to hear the voice of God. "Silence," says Lacordaire, "is the fatherland of great thoughts." When we are alone with God we are better able to appreciate the vanity of earthly things and to realise our own insignificance. We appreciate, moreover, the beauty of virtue and the necessity of striving earnestly to acquire it.

Silence, however, is not sufficient, just as recollection is not

enough. Silence and recollection should not be allowed to deteriorate into inactivity or idle speculation. No effort should be spared to root out vice and to plant in its place the seed of virtue. Let us remember that a retreat is not just a time for listening, but a time for action; therefore it is necessary to employ the mind as well as the will in the task of our spiritual reformation.

3. When Bernini was contemplating the personality of a Saint whose statue he had been commissioned to sculpt, he went thoughtfully into a shop where uncut marble was sold. "What are you looking for, sir?" asked the shopkeeper. "I am looking for a saint," replied Bernini, as he gazed at a block of marble which stood before him.

When we go on retreat, we could be said to resemble this lifeless block of marble. We must wait for the grace of God to give us life. By our determination we must chisel away whatever is superfluous, mould our personality, and give to the shapeless mass the image of a saint. The whole purpose of our retreat should be to cleanse ourselves of the dross of sin and to transform ourselves into saints.

¹ Jer. 12, 11.

4th September

HOLY INDIFFERENCE

1. That is not indifference towards what is good or towards God. That kind of indifference is the apathy and negligence which distracts us from striving to reach our final end by advancing in sanctity.

The holy indifference which we should all have, or endeavour to have, is described by St. Ignatius in his book on the Spiritual Exercises. It is a virtue which renders us indifferent towards all creatures because we see them only as means which will help or

hinder us on the path to sanctity. Therefore we must be indifferent towards sickness and health.

“Grant to me, O Lord,” we should pray, “that which pleases You most. Perhaps you know that health could be a grave danger to me, that it could lead me into offending You, or that at least it could make me too attached to the things of this world. If this is so, send me whatever illnesses You will. I will accept them from Your hands as a gift of Your mercy and goodness and I will try to sanctify myself by means of them. Nature rebels at this thought; yet I must not listen to the prompting of nature, but to the inspirations of grace.

“On the other hand, You may see that my good health would add to Your glory, and help me to grow in sanctity and to be useful in the Apostolate. Grant health to me if it is Your will to do so. I will accept it from Your hands and I will use it solely for Your glory.”

A man who is capable of such high spirituality will not be shaken by the fury of human passion, but will remain always calm and attentive to the demands of grace. He will surrender himself completely to the will of God in all the circumstances of his life.

2. We may wonder whether we are to have a long or a short life. Nature would choose the first alternative, because the will to live and the fear of death are among the strongest of our basic instincts. To obtain a long life we are prepared to promise God that we shall dedicate it to His glory, and spend it in doing good works. But if God sees that a long life would prove to be an occasion of sin for us, and that we should become too deeply attached to this world and forgetful of Heaven, then we should be resigned to, and indeed content with, a short life.

How many young people like St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Dominic Savio, and St. Maria Goretti, have reached the peak of sanctity while still in the flower of their youth! If this were

the will of God for us, surely we should welcome the advent of an early death:

There is another question which often bothers those who look into the future. Shall I be rich or poor? It is natural to desire wealth and to want to avoid poverty. Yet Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor; and woe to the rich!" It is clear then that wealth is likely to be a greater spiritual danger than poverty, for it can cause us to become more attached to worldly possessions. We must, therefore, be indifferent and leave the choice to God. We can save our souls whether we are rich or poor as long as we make right use of whatever we have. So let the will of God be done.

3. The last question which we must ask ourselves is the most difficult. Should we choose honour or humiliation? It is very hard in this case to say to God: "Thy will be done." Yet say it we must. If honour, high position, and success redound to the glory of God and to our spiritual advantage, then let us accept them with humble gratitude. But if Divine Providence ordains that it is better for us to be humiliated and forgotten, we must accept this with cheerful resignation. "Do with me what You will, O Lord," we should pray. "Grant me whatever pleases You, sickness or health, poverty or riches, honour or disgrace." We must always accept the will of God simply because we love Him and wish to serve Him more faithfully. Let us perform all our actions for His glory, for our eternal salvation, and for the salvation of all mankind.

5th September

I AM NOT ABLE

1. Often, when the violence of our passions threatens to overcome all our powers of resistance, we are tempted to say:

“Lord, I am not able; I cannot go any further. Why are You not helping me? Why have You abandoned me?” This is a trick of the devil to make us give up the fight, to make us believe that God has deserted us and that we must inevitably give in to temptation.

This is the last stratagem of the devil when he sees that he cannot persuade us in any other manner. But the Lord addresses to us the reproof which he addressed to St. Peter who, while walking on the water, doubted for an instant, and then felt himself going under. *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*¹ In such a situation, we must strengthen our faith, our love, and our dedication to Jesus Christ. Then the Lord will extend His helping hand to us as He did to Peter. He will give us the spiritual tranquillity which only grace and Christian fortitude can offer.

Let us recall how this has happened in the temptations of our past life. When we were strong and generous with Jesus, we implored His help with faith and perseverance and emerged victorious from the fray. Then we experienced the heavenly joy which only God can give. Why can we not always do the same? We must never say: “I am not able!” We are poor and weak, but with the grace of God we can overcome all obstacles. As St. Paul says, *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*²

2. Whenever we feel called upon to make some sacrifice for Jesus or to form some good resolution, how often do we cry: “I am not able!” It may be a question of praying more fervently, of performing some mortification, or of helping our neighbour spiritually or materially. Or perhaps it is a matter of saying a few words of apology or of encouragement to our neighbour, whom we have previously treated with coldness and selfishness. Or it may be something entirely more generous which is demanded; it may be that God is inviting us to renounce ourselves completely and to dedicate ourselves to Him. Naturally this requires sacrifice, and great generosity of heart. But we say

to Jesus when He calls us: "I cannot, it is too difficult!" And yet the Lord says: *You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy.*³ *You therefore, are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*⁴ We must not refuse God, Who became man for us and shed His Blood for our redemption.

3. When the crosses sent to us by God have seemed too heavy, we have often uttered these words of refusal in a mood of weariness or even in a spirit of revolt. If only we had taken our sorrow to the foot of the Crucifix! Then we would not have had the audacity to have spoken these selfish and unchristian words.

We would have remembered that Jesus, the innocent Lamb, suffered for love of us, and we could not then have told Him that our cross was too heavy. We would have embraced it with resignation and walked towards Heaven in the footsteps of Christ.

¹ Mt. 14, 31.² Phil. 4, 13.³ Lev. 11, 44; 19, 2.⁴ Mt. 5, 48.

6th September

THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE

1. Today's subject for meditation is the parable of the barren fig tree in the Gospel of St. Luke. *A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit thereon and found none. And he said to the vine-dresser, "Behold, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down, therefore; why does it still encumber the ground?" But he answered him and said, "Sir, let it alone this year too, till I dig around it and manure it. Perhaps it may bear fruit, but if not, then afterwards thou shalt cut it down."*¹

Perhaps Jesus has come many times to us also looking for the fruit of our good works, and has found none. Perhaps He has continued to bestow favours and blessings upon us, and perhaps

He has waited many years for us to correspond with His grace by performing acts of penance and of expiation.

We may have made good resolutions many times; but what became of them? Temptations of various kinds may have caused us to neglect these resolutions, which remained like branches without any fruit. We must remember that although God is infinitely good and merciful, He is also infinitely just. The day could come when He might say: "Cut it down. Why does it still encumber the ground?" In that case what would become of us?

An episode described in the Gospel of St. Mark should induce serious reflection. Jesus was walking from Bethany to Jerusalem and grew hungry on the way. He saw a fig tree beside the road but on inspection found that it was barren. *And He said to it "May no fruit ever come from thee henceforth forever!" And immediately the fig tree withered up.* His disciples, we are told, were amazed when they saw this happening.²

How terrible if God should ever pronounce this severe condemnation upon us.

2. One morning after they had fished in vain throughout the night, the Apostles saw Jesus appear on the shore of the lake. *He said to them, "Cast your nets to the right of the boat."*³ They obeyed and caught so many fish that the net was in danger of breaking.

While the Apostles were working without the help of Jesus, they caught nothing. When they worked under the direction of Our Lord they caught a miraculous draught of fishes. In the Garden of Gethsemane, however, the Apostles could not summon the strength to watch and pray with Jesus for even an hour. As a result, they abandoned and denied Him.

For love of gain the Apostles worked throughout *the entire night*; for love of Jesus, however, they were not able to watch and pray for even *an hour*, and so they fell miserably.

3. We should learn two lessons from this meditation. We should

work always for Jesus and with Jesus. If we stray away from Him Who is the way, the truth and the life, we shall get lost, and our efforts will have no value for eternity. Without Jesus, our spiritual life will grow dry. As long as we are with Jesus, everything will be good and holy, even humiliation and sorrow, and all our actions will gain merit for us in Heaven. Furthermore, we must take care not to make the same mistake as the Apostles, who spent the whole night working for material gain but could not watch and pray for even one hour with Jesus. We should consider it our most important obligation in life to work always with Jesus and for Jesus. Only in this way shall we find contentment in this life and happiness in the next.

¹ Luke 13, 6-9.

² Cf. Mt. 21, 18-20.

³ Cf. John 21, 6-11.

7th September

“TO BE SILENT, TO ADORE, AND TO BE HAPPY”

I. When Rosmini was seriously ill and in danger of death he was visited by his admirer and friend, Manzoni, who found him in so serious a condition that he could only breathe with difficulty. In his shaking hands he clutched a crucifix. “Are you suffering much?” Manzoni asked as he bent over him. The sick man gazed at his friend and a wan smile passed over his face. Then the great writer asked him to give him some advice by which he would remember him. Rosmini looked at his crucifix and whispered: “Be silent, adore, and be happy.”

To be Silent: It is very difficult for a man to remain silent when he is suffering great physical pain or when he is slandered, envied or misunderstood. On such occasions one’s blood begins to boil and bitter remarks come easily to the tongue. But what good does it do? It may be some relief to our feelings, but

usually it will only make matters worse by aggravating our trouble. Let us be silent and offer our sufferings to Jesus, Who suffered for us more than we could ever suffer. Let us atone for our sins by silently offering our sorrows and disappointments to God. Any other gift which we give to God is nothing more than restitution for all He has given us; but when we offer our sufferings, we give Him something which is truly our own, because it is we ourselves who suffer. Suffering endured without complaint is a most acceptable gift to God, Who grants us in return peace and resignation.

2. *To Adore:* What are we in the sight of God but poor, weak creatures? How can we rebel against those sufferings with which the Lord in His infinite wisdom allows us to be afflicted? Since it is God Who sends them, it can only mean that He wishes us to profit spiritually from them in the same way as we benefit physically from unpleasant medicine. We gladly recognise, therefore, the mysterious designs of Divine Providence in all the circumstances of our lives, happy and unhappy. Like the holy patriarch Job we should say: *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!*¹ We should repeat, too, with Jesus in Gethsemane: *Not my will but thine be done.*² Like the Saints, we should thank God for all His designs in our regard.

3. *To be Happy:* When the Apostles had been persecuted and threatened with death we read that *they departed rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*³ The Saints were also happy to suffer for Christ. St. Teresa used to say "Either to suffer or to die," while St. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi wished "to suffer and not to die." There were others whose love for Jesus was so great that they prayed for suffering because they considered it an affliction not to be carrying a cross. It is difficult for human nature to desire and to pray for suffering; but when a man really loves God more than himself and more than created things, nothing is too difficult. If we have not

reached such a high level of generosity, however, let us at least resolve to be fully resigned in our acceptance of any trials which He may wish to send us.

¹ Job 1, 21.

² Luke 22, 42.

³ Acts 5, 41.

8th September

THE HEART OF JUDAS

1. The human heart is a mystery, the depths of which it is difficult to sound. We do not even understand ourselves. The heart of man can soar to the loftiest heights of goodness or descend to unimaginable depths of evil. Examples of the sublime heights to which men can rise are provided by the lives of the Saints, who loved God so much that they were on fire with charity and wished to abide forever in Him. *It is now no longer I that live*, said St. Paul, *but Christ lives in me.*¹

The heart of Judas is a particularly deep mystery. We read in the Gospel that Jesus called together His disciples in the supper room to celebrate His last Pasch with them. Among them was Judas. Jesus loved men so much that He wished to remain with them really and truly for all time, even after His approaching death. *Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*² When the meal was over, Jesus took bread and, lifting up His eyes to Heaven, He said: "Take and eat; this is my body." Then He took the chalice, blessed it, and turning towards the Apostles said these words: "All of you drink of this; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many." Then He added: "Do this in remembrance of me." In this way Jesus instituted the Blessed Eucharist, which St. Thomas describes as Christ's greatest miracle.³ Furthermore, He raised His disciples, including Judas, to the sublime dignity

of the priesthood, and bestowed on them the power to do what He had just done. One might say that the infinite generosity of Jesus Christ was exhausted at that moment. He could not give anything more because at that moment He had given us Himself.

It was in this solemn moment, in which he received Jesus into his soul and was at the same time raised to the dignity of the priesthood, that Judas finally decided to carry out his plan to sell his Master for thirty pieces of silver and to hand Him over to those who wished to kill Him. How sin can degrade a human being!

2. How did Judas fall to such a level? Certainly it did not happen in an instant. His dominant passion was probably small in the beginning but, when it was not repressed in time, grew daily and finally came to exercise absolute control over his heart. It was avarice, that vilest and most material of passions, which caused him to fall.

Judas had been appointed bursar and administrator of the small offerings which the faithful made to the Apostles. He became attached to this money and may have begun to steal small sums which grew bigger with time, until greed prompted him to sell Jesus for thirty miserable pieces of silver. He carried out his plan at the very moment when Jesus bestowed on him His greatest gifts and elevated him to the highest dignity.

We should meditate on this terrible tragedy while there is still time for us to save ourselves from sinking to the same level of degradation. This could easily happen if we neglect to resist temptation at once and to pray fervently for Divine help the moment we are tempted.

3. Even after his betrayal, Judas still had time to make amends. It would have sufficed if he had gone to Jesus and asked Him for forgiveness. He would certainly have received the kiss of peace. He was overcome by despair, however, and decided that his sin was too great to be forgiven. So, throwing away his money, the reward of his betrayal, he took a rope and *hanged*

*himself with a halter.*⁴ If we should ever have the misfortune to fall into sin, we should remember that the mercy of God is infinite. It is enough to go to Him and to ask for pardon and for the grace not to offend Him any more under any circumstances. We should then resolve to love Him with all the power of our poor hearts, to atone for our sins, and to serve Him faithfully for the rest of our lives.

¹ Gal. 2, 20.² John 13, 1.³ De fest Corp. Christi, Bk. V.⁴ Matt. 27, 5.

9th September

THE TWO STANDARDS

1. The well-known meditation of St. Ignatius in his "Spiritual Exercises" on the two standards remains applicable to our times. We need only glance at the world to see that it contains two different kinds of people—the good and the bad, the enemies of Christ and His faithful followers. But there is also a third group, those who are indifferent and apathetic, those who think of their own comfort and convenience and of nothing else. When one considers it, it is plain that those people who think only of themselves—and their number seems to grow every year—belong to the rearguard of those who fight beneath the banner of Satan. That man is an enemy of Christ who has no generosity, no spirit of sacrifice, no desire to combat the evil which threatens to submerge the world. *He who is not with me is against me,*¹ said Jesus. He who thinks only of his own convenience and remains indifferent to the spread of evil is not worthy of Jesus. One cannot be indifferent when faced with the alternative between good and evil, because indifference is tantamount to a betrayal. "The Christian," writes Tertullian, "is another Christ."

The fact that we are Christians imposes on us the obligation to fight openly and courageously under the standard of Christ. The battle must be waged on two fronts. On one side, the struggle is internal. We must resist our rebellious inclinations and self-centred egoism. At the same time, we must make a constant effort to advance in Christian perfection. On the second front, the struggle is external. It is not sufficient to sanctify ourselves, but we must also try to sanctify others. When we consider the sacrifices made in the cause of evil by the enemies of Christ, how can we remain indifferent? We should work with zeal and with the help of God's grace to achieve our own sanctification and the reign of Christ in the universe. We should examine what we have already done and resolve to be more determined in our future efforts.

2. Apart from the throngs of the apathetic, we can see today, as in every stage of the history of Christianity, two armies in battle array, the enemies of Christ and His faithful. Both the forces of good and evil, and the weapons which they have at their disposal, have increased tremendously in modern times. Between them there is Christ, *a sign that shall be contradicted*,² as Simeon prophesied. There are those who give themselves completely to Jesus, their abilities, their health, their virginity offered as a sacrifice for a higher ideal, and, if necessary, their life's blood. But there are also those who use every means which progress has provided, such as the press, cinema, and television, in order to destroy God's dominion over human souls.

Evil today is organised on a vast scale. Why, then, can we not employ every modern means in order to diffuse goodness throughout the world? This may require sacrifice, but we cannot refuse to make sacrifices on behalf of Jesus Christ, Who did not spare Himself for us.

To work, then! Let us make good resolutions. Sanctity, towards which we must all strive, consists in never refusing Jesus anything, no matter what He asks and no matter what

sacrifice He demands of us. This is what it means to be real Christians, sincere followers and soldiers of Jesus Christ.

¹ Mt. 12, 30.

² Luke 2, 34.

10th September

THE CREATION

1. God is infinitely perfect in Himself and has therefore no need of creatures for His eternal happiness. He knows Himself fully; and this act of knowing is not transient, but substantial and eternal. It is the perfect image of His own Essence, the Word which expresses His Divine Infinity.

Knowing Himself in the infinite depths of His truth, beauty, and goodness, God naturally loves Himself. This love, also substantial and eternal, is the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Word, since God loves Himself because He knows Himself perfectly. The happiness of God, as St. Gregory Nazianzen writes, is not a solitary state of beatitude. He has within Himself the Word, His consubstantial Son, in Whom is reflected the perfection of His nature, and to Whom He repeats from eternity: *You are my son; this day I have begotten you.*¹ Moreover, in an act equally substantial and infinite, He pours forth His love, the Holy Spirit. Because He is infinitely happy and perfect in Himself, God wished to manifest His perfection and to communicate His happiness to others. According to St. Thomas, the only reason why God has created is to manifest His glory and to share His happiness. Creation is, therefore, an act of love. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.*² "God," says St. Irenaeus, "did not create man because He had need of him, but because He wished to have creatures on whom He could shower His gifts." That is why Sacred Scripture tells us that *the Lord has made every thing for His own ends.*³

Turning over these reflections in our minds, we should make

an act of profound humility before God and acknowledge that we are nothing without Him. We should express our deep gratitude to God for our very existence and for all the other gifts with which He has enriched us.

Finally, we should pay Him the tribute of our love, which should be expressed in a practical manner, as well as verbally, by complete and constant fidelity to His commandments.

2. Dante describes the Creation beautifully as "Eternal Love expanded into new loves." Heaven and earth, angels and men, and all created beings are nothing more than an expansion of this Eternal Love into new loves. Love unites and fills everything. Everywhere in Heaven and on earth, there is love, there is need of love. But whom shall we love? The creatures who surround us? Yes. We may and should love them. They are rays of the light and beauty of God. We should love them because they reflect the power and glory of God. But we must not become attached to them. We must not try to find in them happiness and peace of mind. They cannot give us contentment because our hearts are made for something greater. God made creatures for Himself, as St. Augustine says, and therefore our hearts will not rest until they rest in Him.

3. Creatures should form a ladder by which we climb to God. God should be the first thought, aim, and love of our lives. If we were to substitute creatures for God, our journey to Heaven would be impeded. Worse still, they could drag us into sin and towards eternal damnation.

¹ Ps. 2, 7.

² Jer. 31, 3.

³ Prov. 16, 4.

I Ith September

THE INCARNATION

1. By means of the Incarnation God comes to man so that man may return to God. God created man by an act of love to

display and to diffuse His infinite goodness. But this relationship of love was disrupted by sin. Love became fear on the part of man, and it became justice on the part of God.

The love of God is infinite, however, and cannot decrease. No sooner had man fallen than God promised our first parents that He Himself would come to save them. As soon as man had lost the white robe of grace, the Lord mercifully promised that He would come to restore it. But how? He could have sent an angel to lead erring man back to the fold and to teach him the way of virtue which leads to Heaven. That would have been a great act of love and mercy. But an angel is a finite being, whereas the love of God has no limit. For this reason He was not satisfied to send an angel.

We can see, furthermore, another explanation of the great mystery of the Incarnation. God infinitely loved man, who was the work of His omnipotence. Precisely because He loved him, He wished to be loved by him in return. But because the spirit of Man is united to matter he does not see God except through the works of His creation. He sees Him, as it were, *through a mirror in an obscure manner*,¹ and not face to face. He does not love God, therefore, as he would if he could see Him in all His beauty. He would need to see Him and to know Him better before he could love Him more. So God made Himself small by becoming man. "Human wisdom often asks," writes Bossuet, "why God came on earth. To this I reply: He came to be loved by men." "God was great," writes St. Bernard, "so great as to demand to be adored. Now He has become small so that He may be better loved." God became, like us, a child. *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared*,² says St. Paul. But Jesus was not satisfied merely to become like us, to enlighten us with His doctrine, and to enrich us with the abundance of His graces and gifts. He also gave Himself completely to us by dying on the Cross and remaining with us in the Blessed Sacrament. How could we fail to return such love?

2. The Incarnation, which is the coming of God among men that He might be loved more, requires that man in return love God and be obedient to His commandments.

Since the infinite God could do no more for us than give us His entire self, it is only right that we should be prepared to make any sacrifice in order to prove our love for Him. The mystery of the Incarnation not only demands our love; it also requires that this love should induce us to lead better lives. Jesus, God made man, should be the model which will encourage us to obey His laws and to follow His example.

3. We conclude with this lovely prayer of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori:

"All-powerful Son of God, You became man that You might be loved by men. Dear Jesus, for whom do you search upon this earth? You have come to search for me, poor lost sheep, that I may not stray far from You and that I may love You. Jesus, my treasure, my love, my all, accept the gift which I make of myself. I wish only to live loving You, and to die in Your love. Amen."

¹ 1 Cor. 13, 12.

² Tit. 3, 4.

12th September

THE REDEMPTION

1. The Incarnation of God was sufficient to have saved us. It would have been enough for God made man to have offered Himself to God for our redemption in a single act of love. Every act of Jesus, the God-man, had infinite value and was therefore sufficient to be offered to the Father as an infinite satisfaction for all our sins.

But if Jesus had desired to show more clearly his great love for us, He could have offered His sufferings as a child in the cold

cave at Bethlehem, when He lay whimpering on a wretched straw bed. He could have offered the sorrow of his exile in Egypt, He could have offered a single drop of His Precious Blood during the ceremony of circumcision. He could have offered the difficulties and privations of His simple working life at Nazareth, or the fatiguing exertions of His apostolic journeys. All these would have been more than enough to have made amends to the divine Father for all the sins of humanity, to have ransomed us from the devil, and to have restored to us God's grace and love. But in God everything is infinite. His love has no limit. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart," He has commanded men, "and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength, and with thy whole mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." He Himself did infinitely more than this, however. Jesus was not satisfied merely to love us, His brothers by adoption, as He loved Himself, but He wished to love us *more than He loved Himself. Greater love than this no one has*, He said, *that one lay down his life for his friends.*¹ This was what He Himself did. Sinful though we are, He called us friends. *You are my friends.*² Out of love for us He gave Himself entirely. He perspired blood in the Garden of Gethsemane; He was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and abandoned by the Apostles; He was bound like a criminal, insulted, scourged, crowned with thorns, condemned to death, and burdened with a cross; finally, when He arrived at Calvary, He was nailed to the gibbet, where He shed His Precious Blood and gave His life for our redemption. Such was the extent of Jesus' infinite love for us.

"Calvary," writes St. Francis de Sales, "is the school of love." The Saints were moved to tears by the strange spectacle of God-made-man dying on the cross for men. What is our reaction?

2. Do I ever think of all that I have cost Jesus? Do I ever meditate on His infinite love for me? If I could constantly bear in mind the work of Redemption and the passion of Jesus Christ, I should certainly never offend God and I should be on fire with

love for Him. Moreover, if in time of temptation I were to pray earnestly before the image of Christ crucified, I should certainly succeed in my resistance by asking the suffering Lord for His divine assistance.

If by some misfortune, however, I should fall into sin, it should suffice to kiss the crucifix in order to revive my confidence in Christ, to rouse myself to sorrow, to obtain pardon, and to begin a new life. That should be the fruit of the Redemption for me.

3. In conclusion, let us say this prayer of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori:

"My soul, look at this crucified Man . . . see how the arms extend to embrace you, how the head bows forward to give you the kiss of peace. See how His side is open to receive you. What have you to say? Such a good and loving God deserves to be loved. O my Jesus! Adorable Jesus! O Love of my soul! How can I ever forget You? How can I ever love anything apart from You? O suffering Jesus, may the memory of You ever remain in my heart."

¹ I John 15, 13.

² John 15; 14.

13th September

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

1. The bonds of love between God and us, which had been broken by sin, were restored by the Redemption.

These bonds of love between our soul and the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are described by St. Bonaventure in this manner. (1) The soul is the daughter of the Divine Father. (2) It is the spouse of Jesus Christ. (3) It is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The concept of our divine sonship can be found even in the Old Testament. *As one whom the mother caresseth*, God promises,

so will I comfort you.¹ But Jesus insisted in a special way on this concept of our divine sonship so that we might love our heavenly Father more. He told us to address God as Father in our prayers. He described Him as a loving Father, waiting with love and forgiveness for His prodigal sons. When leaving this earth He told us: "I go to my Father, and to your Father."

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, writes St. John, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.*² *You have not received a spirit of bondage, explains St. Paul, so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry: "Abba! Father!"*³ This divine paternity is the result of the elevation of our souls to the supernatural order by means of grace, which flows into our souls and makes us partakers of the very life of God. It is necessary, therefore, to nourish this grace in ourselves by praying to our heavenly Father with humility and with perseverance. It is equally essential for us to keep this grace alive by being obedient always to the commandments of God and to His holy will.

Let us examine our behaviour and see if we can honestly claim that we are one with God in mind and in heart, in intention and in action.

2. The soul should also be the spouse of Jesus Christ. The union between us and our Lord should be loving and intimate, like that of husband and wife. Jesus has been called our brother, *the firstborn among many brethren.*⁴ We are, in fact, the adopted sons of God, just as He is the natural Son. But Jesus was not satisfied merely to show us fraternal love by giving us His heavenly Father as our Father and His Mother Mary as our mother. He wanted to give us something even more intimate, so He communicated to us His very life. The soul of a Christian is the spouse of Jesus, not only because it is united closely with Him, but because through the channel of His grace He gives it His own divine life. Jesus has often spoken to His Saints as to a spouse. "Christ is our spouse and wishes to be loved by us,"

writes St. Bernard. "He desires," says St. Teresa, "to be loved by us and to love us with the love of a spouse. He demands all the affection of which our hearts are capable." We should examine ourselves to see if we really return this intimate love of Jesus. Above all, we should ensure that all our actions are performed solely out of love for Him.

3. Finally, we are, or should be, the temples of the Holy Spirit. *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*⁵ writes St. Paul. "Man," writes St. Cyril of Alexandria, "is composed of body and soul. The Christian is composed of body and soul and the Holy Spirit." Before this can be said of us, however, it is necessary for divine grace to flourish and bear fruit within us. Then the soul will really have become God's dwelling-place. It will be like a miniature Heaven in which the Lord gloriously reigns.

Let us study the Saints carefully. They live in this world but they are not immersed in it. Their souls are already in Heaven through grace, even as they will one day reside there in glory. Because of this, their personalities radiate peace and contentment.

Of them it can truly be said: *Our citizenship is in heaven.*⁶ Our minds and our hearts should always be in Heaven. We should never allow sin to deprive us of the Holy Spirit.

Let everything in us be clean and pure, as becomes saints of God.

¹ Is. 66, 13.² 1 John 3, 1.³ Rom. 8, 15.⁴ Rom. 8, 29.⁵ 1 Cor. 3, 16; 6, 19.⁶ Phil. 3, 20.

14th September

FILIAL AND SERVILE FEAR

1. We should not be afraid of God, because He is our greatest benefactor and loves us infinitely. When we are lost, He searches

for us as a loving father would search for a wandering son. Because they think only of the majesty and justice of God, some people keep themselves at a distance from Him, as Adam did after he had sinned. They forget that the Lord told Adam, the sinner, of the coming of the pardoning Redeemer.¹ Bossuet truly observes that "after the curse which came upon men through sin there has always remained in their hearts a certain dread of the supernatural which prevents them from approaching God with confidence." Jansenism increased this fear, emphasising the justice and majesty of God rather than the infinite love of Jesus and the beauty of His teaching.

Some writers compare our souls with the divine majesty and justice in order to stress our unworthiness, but they forget that Jesus is "meek and humble of heart," that He forgave the penitent Magdalen, the adulteress, and the good thief, and had kind words for the lost sheep and the prodigal son. They never think of the wonderful words of the beloved disciple: *God is love.*²

This false fear of God dries up our piety, and lessens our trust in His mercy. It can lead to moroseness, to scrupolosity, and to discouragement.

We should avoid this excessive fear which separates us from God. Even though we are sinful and unworthy, we should remember that God is our loving Father, Who is always ready to help us and to grant us forgiveness. We should recall, moreover, that out of love for us He did not spare His own Son,³ but gave Him to us for our redemption. If Jesus shed His blood and died for us, how can we doubt His love?

2. It is true that the fear of God is recommended many times in Sacred Scripture, but it is filial fear which is intended, not servile fear.

Servile fear keeps us apart from God. But filial fear is akin to love and brings us closer to Him. We should desire never to offend God because we love Him, not because we fear Him. When one loves another with all one's heart, it is nearly im-

possible to offend him. In this sense *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*,⁴ and therefore of sanctity. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit which produces in us a complete and loving submission to God, our Father, and keeps us far from sin because it is displeasing to Him.

This filial fear is pleasing to God, for *he fulfils the desire of those who fear him, he hears their cry and saves them*.⁵

Love therefore, writes St. Paul, is the fulfilment of the law.⁶ We should certainly fear God, but above all we should love Him. If we love Him, we shall be glad to keep His commandments and we shall have great spiritual peace and contentment.

3. "O Jesus, My King, my friend and the love of my soul, take possession of it. I consecrate it entirely to You. Your majesty inspires fear, but to a far greater degree Your goodness inspires love. You are my King and You shall always be my only love. If I have any fear, it will be the fear of displeasing You. O Mary, my Queen, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to my beloved King."⁷

¹ Gen. 3, 9.

² 1 John 4, 16.

³ Cf. Rom. 8, 32.

⁴ Prov. 1, 7.

⁵ Ps. 144, 19.

⁶ Rom. 13, 10.

⁷ St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

15th September

MY LIFE IS CHRIST

1. St. Paul reached such a degree of union with Christ that he could exclaim: *To me to live is Christ*.¹ Elsewhere he says: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me*.² This is a characteristic of the Saints. They live their own lives no longer, for they live the life of Christ. That is to say, their minds and hearts are always fixed on Jesus. They love the Lord more than all things, and more than themselves. God is the object of all

their desires, affections and actions. As a result, the soul is transfigured and is infused with divine life, so that it does nothing which is not activated by grace. In the Saints, then, there is reflected something heavenly which attracts and stimulates one to virtue.

The Saints preached effectively in simple, unadorned language, as in the case of the Curé d'Ars. But their most effective sermon was the example of their lives. They could say with St. Paul: "To me to live is Christ." They could repeat the thought of St. Jerome: "Christ is the breath of my lips." Like St. John Chrysostom they could say: "My heart is the heart of Christ." They could say with St. Augustine: "I am only an instrument in the service of Christ," and with St. Anselm: "My eyes are the eyes of Christ." When we meditate on these words, which signify the height of sanctity, we feel very small, shabby, and far from the Christian perfection to which we should aspire. Perhaps we are still immersed in sin; or perhaps we are wavering between the things of this world and the things of God; or perhaps, as yet, we have not given up our egoism and complacent mediocrity in order to offer ourselves entirely to God. Real Christianity demands that we renounce ourselves, live the life of Christ, and make every effort to acquire perfection.

2. Through the work of the Incarnation and Redemption, Jesus assumed not only a human body and soul so that He might be loved more and so that He might redeem us, but He also assumed a mystical body, which is composed of all men in the state of grace. This mystical body is the Church, of which Christ is the head. We should all desire to be members of this mystical body. To do so we must live the life of Christ, which is His grace. If we are separated from the life of Christ, we are no longer Christians. We are merely dead and rotten limbs, to use the metaphor of the vine tree and the branches. *I am the vine, says Jesus, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, He continues, he bears much fruit. If anyone does not abide in me,*

He adds, *he shall be cast outside as the branch and wither; and they shall gather them up and cast them into the fire, and they shall burn.*³

“For the branch,” says St. Augustine, “there can be no half-measures. Either it remains united with the vine, or it is thrown into the fire.” The same holds true for each of us. We must choose either close union with Jesus, or separation and spiritual death. We must decide between a life of fervour in Christ, or a life of tepidity and sin.

3. Am I determined to live the life of Christ by striving to be indissolubly united with Him through divine grace? Am I prepared to say with St. Paul: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*⁴ But in order to bring this about it is necessary for me to fly from every sin and to look for God in all things and in all actions. I must love God with my whole heart and nurture the divine life within me by prayer, recollection and frequent Communion. If I fail to put these resolutions into practice, I shall become a barren branch, fit only for eternal fire.

¹ Phil. 1, 21.

² Gal. 2, 20.

³ Cf. John 15, 4-5.

⁴ Rom. 8, 35-39.

16th September

CHRIST'S WORK IN US

1. It is not enough that Jesus live in us; He must increase and act in us continually. The spiritual life is like natural life. It cannot stop, for to halt would mean death. If Jesus is our life, He should live in us with ever-increasing intensity. Life is like a stairway; we are either going up or coming down.

If we continue to climb energetically towards Jesus, we shall

be coming nearer to Christian perfection. If, on the other hand, we halt, the supernatural life of Jesus in us will begin to weaken. Tepidity will replace fervour, and sin will succeed tepidity. It is difficult to remain unchanged, because life involves movement. "Jesus Christ," writes St. Augustine, "was born a baby, but He did not remain one. He grew to boyhood, to adolescence, and then to maturity."

It is necessary for us to grow also. More precisely, it is necessary that Jesus grow continuously in us through faith, charity, and good works. *Court the good*, admonishes St. Paul, *from a good motive always . . . until Christ is formed in you.*¹

It is not enough that Christ be born in us; it is necessary that He increase to the fullness of perfection.² "Jesus increases daily," writes Origen, "in the soul of the holy and just man, which mirrors His grace, His wisdom, and His sanctity. In the soul of the unfortunate sinner, however, Christ decreases and dies."

What kind of life has Jesus in my soul? If I am in the state of grace, He lives in my soul; but how does He live? In some, those of us who are tepid, worldly and dissipated, Jesus is hidden and languid. In those who are lazy, mediocre and indifferent, He seems to sleep, as He slept in the boat during the storm on the lake of Galilee. In those souls which have given in to temptation and surrendered themselves to sin, He is crucified and dying. Finally, there are souls in which He reigns supreme and which are resplendent with the magnificence of His gifts and graces. If we find ourselves in this last category, let us humbly thank God. But if we are forced to count ourselves among the tepid or the lazy or the sinful, let us rouse ourselves at once and pray fervently to God to help us to save our souls.

2. "Whoever has Jesus in his heart," writes St. Francis de Sales, "has Him also in his actions." If God really lives in us, He cannot be inactive, but will work with us for our sanctification. Our actions must be the actions of Jesus Christ. Remember that the Gospel says that a good tree will produce good fruit, while a

bad tree will produce bad fruit.³ From the fruits which we produce we can see clearly if Jesus is working in us. Holiness consists in accepting the will of God, whatever it is, whether it be sacrifice, sorrow or humiliation. We must allow Jesus to act in us as He desires. Not only must we conform to His holy will, but we must do so with enthusiasm. We must be obedient instruments of His grace, doing precisely what He wants us to do. If He wishes us to suffer, we must be prepared to do so for Him, knowing that we are participating and co-operating in the work of His Redemption. If He desires us to be happy, we should humbly accept happiness from His hands. Everything must be as Jesus wills. We must transform ourselves into Him, like the white host which first is bread and through the act of consecration becomes Jesus Christ.

3. "My beloved Jesus, I offer you my heart and I consecrate to You all my affections, my soul and all its faculties, and my will so that it may be united with Yours. Unite my intentions, my words, and my actions with Yours, and vivify them with Your holy spirit. Let me undertake nothing save from the motive of love for You. My beloved Jesus, make every action of mine one of adoration, love, and submission to Your holy will."⁴

¹ Gal. 4, 18-19.

² Cf. Eph. 4, 13-16.

³ Cf. Mt. 7, 17.

⁴ St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

17th September

THE COMMANDMENTS AND THE DESIRES OF JESUS CHRIST

1. Sanctity consists in doing the will of God in all things. We can become perfect by doing His will from the motive of love alone. *He who has my commandments and keeps them*, said Jesus,

*he it is who loves me. But he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him.*¹

Do we wish to know if we love God sincerely? The proof is in this. If we do His will and obey His precepts, it is a sign that we love Him; but if we do not observe His commandments, we lie when we say that we love Him. We must therefore show our love by observing in all things the commandments of God. He gave us these commandments out of love for us, so that by observing them we should be saved and should be happy with Him. Even as He has given them out of love, we should observe them out of love, for He is our supreme and only good. Just as Jesus lovingly did the will of his heavenly Father, from Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Nazareth to Calvary, and from Calvary to Heaven, so we should follow in His footsteps by doing the adorable will of God in all the circumstances of our lives, both joyful and sorrowful. But we must obey the divine will out of love, that is, because we love God whole-heartedly and above all created things.

Everything is easy to him who loves. "When we love him who gives us orders," says St. Francis de Sales, "even the hardest of actions become easy."

Let us examine ourselves. Are we always ready to obey the commandments of God at any cost and would we die rather than offend Him? Let us examine ourselves also to see if we do all this out of love for Jesus. *He who does not love*, writes St. John, *abides in death.*²

2. One who loves is not content merely to do the will of the loved one; he tries to satisfy his every wish. If we really love Jesus, therefore, not only should we do His will perfectly, but we should also fulfil every desire of His heart. But what are the desires of Jesus? His first desire is the glory of His Father, which we must promote by every means in collaboration with divine

grace. His second is our sanctification. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*³ *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*⁴

In the third place, we should take part as far as we can in works of the Apostolate, for the triumph of the Church and of the kingdom of God on earth. Are we doing all this? Perhaps on the day of our death we shall have to say: How much good I could have done, and I neglected to do it! How much more I should have loved my God, yet I loved Him so little.

3. "O my Saviour, I adore You with the perfect submission which you showed to the will of Your Father. I ask pardon for all the obstacles which I have placed in the way of Your holy will. In union with the perfect submission which You, Your mother, and all Your Saints displayed in regard to the will of God, I profess that neither in life nor in death do I desire anything other than Your adorable will."⁵

¹ John 14, 21-23.

⁴ Matt. 5, 48.

² 1 John 3, 14.

⁵ St. John Eudes.

³ 1 Thess. 4, 3.

18th September

GOOD READING

I. Books are fashionable nowadays; in fact, a great many are published which are never read. There has been a mania for books ever since the invention of printing fanned the flaming urge to write and to publish. There are good books, useless books, and, unfortunately, bad books, including newspapers, magazines and reviews of all descriptions. Sometimes these are serious publications; but usually they are light, unhealthy, enticing to sin, and even trading in sin. They corrode the soul, undermine morals, destroy the innocence of childhood and of

youth, and spread indifference, error and degeneration everywhere. Good publications inspired by the Gospel are necessary to counteract this tide of immorality. It is not enough to disapprove of bad literature. We must not read it, we must keep it out of our homes, and we must see that it does not fall into careless or innocent hands. Moreover, it is necessary to fight back by helping and giving our full support to good literature.

It has been observed that if St. Paul were to return to the world, he would become a journalist, because in these days the press is the most powerful influence for good and the most potent weapon with which to combat evil. It is certain that if St. Paul were to return to the world, he would be an Apostle, as he once was, in the complete sense of the word, and would not be content to exercise only the apostolate of the press. Nevertheless, it is a fact that today the press is the most powerful and most widespread medium of the Apostolate. Since we must all be Apostles, at least in the wide sense of the word, we should oppose bad literature and support worth-while publications as much as we can.

Let us examine ourselves earnestly in the presence of God. Are the books, journals and reviews which we buy and read all good? Do we have in our homes books and papers which could do harm and prove dangerous to those who live with us? Do we support and encourage good publications? Perhaps we have a great deal to review and to correct in this matter. If so, let us promise God that we shall do our best to improve.

2. There are some who by reason of their position or work must read bad books or books which are on the Index. With regard to the latter, it is necessary to ask and to obtain permission from the legitimate ecclesiastical authority.

With regard to bad books in general or to those which are merely worldly, we should observe the following norms which are laid down by authorities on the spiritual life. (1) Read these books only if obliged to do so by reason of position or office,

and never from unhealthy curiosity. (2) Before reading ask for the grace of God by at least a short mental or vocal prayer. (3) Take care that these bad publications do not reach the hands of simple people to whom they could be harmful. (4) Finally, read good books also, for the poisonous inoculation of evil and error can penetrate even the best and most upright spirits unless some antidote is employed.

3. More particularly, everybody needs to do some good reading every day in order to further his own spiritual formation. It is so easy to be distracted by worldly affairs and to grow lukewarm in the practice of virtue. Good books are faithful friends which speak to the heart, enlighten the mind, and urge the will to good action. Besides books of meditations, the lives of the Saints can be very edifying. It is necessary to read them thoughtfully, interrupting our reading occasionally in order to reflect and to apply our conclusions to our own lives. The example of the holiness of the Saints will prompt us to say to ourselves like St. Augustine: "If others, why not I?" If the Saints could reach such heights of sanctity and such fervent love for God, why cannot I do the same?

19th September

GOSPEL READING

I. The Gospel is the books of books, for it contains, not the words of men, but the words of God. In the beginning the Word of God was made man and became the life-giving word during His earthly life. Thus we have the written word in the Sacred Scriptures. When we read the Gospel, we should imagine that Jesus is there before us, so that we can hear the words from His divine lips and feel the breath of His life and the fire of His love.

“In Heaven,” says St. Augustine, “Jesus continues to speak to us on earth through His Gospel.” His words are the bright stars which should guide men—often wandering in the darkness of error or engulfed in the abyss of sin—through the way of virtue and goodness towards Heaven. The more one penetrates the Gospel the more one gets to know Jesus Christ. St. Augustine writes that the Gospel is another way which Jesus has chosen of remaining among us. The same holy Doctor does not hesitate to say that “he who scorns even one of these sacred words would be no less guilty than if he let the Blessed Eucharist fall on the ground through negligence.” When we read the sacred pages we begin to understand the infinite goodness of Jesus. We see Him whimper and suffer in the manger at Bethlehem; we see Him humbly working as a poor labourer in the workshop in Nazareth; we see Him pardon Magdalen and the penitent adulteress; we see Him restore life to the dead, sight to the blind, and health to all kinds of sick people; in the supper-room we see Him give us Himself under the veil of the Blessed Eucharist, at the very moment when He was forgotten, denied and betrayed; we see Him in the Praetorium before Pilate, where He was scourged for our sins; we see Him on Calvary dying on a cross for us, forgiving His crucifiers, and promising Heaven to the penitent thief; and finally, we see Him rising from the dead and ascending gloriously into Heaven, where He went to prepare a place for us, should we persevere as His faithful followers. *I go to prepare a place for you.*¹

The Saints often read and meditated on the Gospel. It provided spiritual food for their souls. In the life of St. Philip Neri, we read that during his last years he read nothing but the Gospels, especially the Gospel of St. John, which treats profoundly of the love of God. Do you read the Gospel? With what dispositions and with what results do you read it? In modern times, unfortunately, very few read it at all. That is why so many stray so far from the spirit of Jesus, and why they often display a

material form of piety, insipid and useless in the practice of the Christian life.

2. It is not enough to read and to meditate on the Gospel. We should do so with the correct dispositions, which are three in number. In the first place we should read the Gospel with the recollection of one who prays. "Prayer must often interrupt reading," says St. Bonaventure. Now and again while we are reading, we should lift our minds to God and ask Him to enlighten us and to inspire us towards greater fervour.

Heavenly truths cannot be understood or penetrated without the light and grace which comes from on high. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life*, Jesus said. *No one comes to the Father but through me.*² The Gospel, therefore, cannot be read like any other book. It is the word of supernatural life which cannot be infused into our souls, except by grace, for which we should pray humbly and with fervour. In the second place we should read slowly and reflectively. "Read with the heart and not with the eyes," writes Bossuet. "Profit by that which you understand, adore that which you don't." In the Gospel there is always something which is applicable to ourselves and to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. The Saints found there their own particular road to the sanctity to which they had been called; from our reflective and devout study of the sacred pages we also shall find what Jesus wants in a particular way from us.

3. Finally, we should practise what we learn in the Gospel. If this were not the result of our reading, our efforts would be worth very little. When reading, we should apply to our lives the spirit and the precepts of Jesus. This was the practice of the Saints, whose lives were a continual implementation of the Gospel message. St. Aloysius and many others understood and applied to their own lives the maxim: "Blessed are the clean of heart." St. Francis and his followers applied another maxim: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." St. Francis de Sales applied to

himself in a special way the words: "Blessed are the meek." As a result, he was noted for his gentleness of character.

We should read the Gospel every day. It should be for us a school of practical spirituality, specially adapted to the needs of our own soul, which will finally lead us to sanctity.

¹ John 14, 2.

² John 14, 6.

20th September

THE DIVINE COUNSELLOR

1. It is often difficult and unpleasant to take advice from someone whom we dislike; but when we really like somebody, his advice is always acceptable and we are inclined to take it to heart. Counsel is the light of the soul, which points out to us which path to follow. Often we are surrounded by darkness; we do not know which way to turn, for uncertainty and discouragement have paralysed our will. Now Jesus, as St. John tells us, is the light which enlightens every man who comes into this world; He is full of grace and of truth.¹ If we love Jesus, we shall always receive from Him the light and counsel which we need; His enlightenment is clear and His counsel satisfies fully the needs of our hearts. How can we have this light and this counsel? Jesus speaks to our souls in many ways. He speaks to us when we read the pages of the Gospel; when we recollect ourselves in His presence during meditation; when we visit Him in the Tabernacle and speak to Him really and truly present under the Eucharistic species; and when we ask Him in all our difficulties for holy inspirations which will guide us and direct us towards whatever is good. God will never deny His light and counsel to a humble supplicant.

There are men from whom we may and should ask advice.

There are priests, who are the ministers of God and the authorised dispensers of his grace. There is our confessor and spiritual director, who knows the state of our soul and will be able to give us any special advice which we need. Finally, if we have the good fortune to meet a real Saint in the course of our lives, we have met Jesus Himself. The Saints can speak to us with the voice of God, for before advising us they have listened to it in their own hearts.

In every necessity, difficulty, and uncertainty of our lives, therefore, we should seek advice from our confessor or spiritual director so that he may enlighten us and speak to us in God's name.

Then if we know any holy persons—and there are always Saints in the Church—we should reveal to them the secrets of our hearts and receive from them enlightenment, advice, and consolation.

2. Nobody can speak to our souls with greater efficacy than Jesus Christ. "Listen to the interior Master," wrote St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. "Never do anything without seeking His advice."

Certain conditions are necessary, however, before we can hear the voice of God in the intimacy of our hearts. First of all, there must be silence and recollection. Jesus does not speak where there is noise and dissipation; and even if He were to speak, His voice would not be heard.

It is necessary now and again—especially in moments of difficulty—to remove ourselves from the external confusion of life so that we shall be able to hear the voice of God. Then, it is true, we shall hear two voices, and we shall hesitate . . . One is the voice of nature. When we feel that we have been offended, it urges us to seek revenge or at least to let our attitude be known. When temptations assail us and upset our peace of mind, we hear a pleasant voice urging us to satisfy our sinful inclinations. But there is another voice within us; it is gentle and sweet like

Jesus Himself; it is calm, serene and lofty, like all that is eternal. We must listen to this, not to the other; this we must accept and follow with full deliberation, even if it entails grave sacrifice.

There must be sacrifice, for it is not sufficient to enter an atmosphere of silence and recollection in order to listen to the voice of Jesus, our divine Counsellor. We must also have the courage and the Christian fortitude to put His advice and teaching into practice.

3. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies. Let not Moses nor any of the Prophets speak to me; but speak Thou rather, O Lord God, the Inspirer and Enlightener of all the Prophets . . . They may indeed sound forth words, but they give not the spirit. Most beautifully do they speak; but if Thou be silent, they inflame not the heart . . . They declare the commandments, but Thou enablest us to fulfil them. They show the way, but Thou givest strength to walk in it . . . Speak to me, that it may be some comfort to my soul, and the amendment of my whole life; and also to Thy praise, glory, and everlasting honour."²

¹ John I, 9-14.

² Cf. *Imit. of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 2.

21st September

SEEING GOD IN ALL THINGS

I. Very often, when things are not going our way, we become restless and irritable. We want health, and instead we are sick. We long for success and high position, and instead we are forgotten and humiliated. We desire to be holy, and instead God humbles our pride and allows us to fall into sin again and again. We wish that affairs in our immediate surroundings would proceed according to our liking, but in fact everything happens

in an entirely different way. What is the remedy for the tension and annoyance which we experience on these occasions? There is only one; we must see God in all the events and circumstances of life and do His will lovingly and generously. Faith, says St. Francis de Sales, is a ray of light from Heaven which makes us see God in all things and all things in God. It was his great disciple, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who wrote: "To be nothing, to be much, to be small; to command, to obey one person or another; to be humiliated or forgotten; to be poor or rich; to be underworked or overworked; to be alone or to be in company; to receive spiritual consolations or to experience aridity and temptation; to be healthy, or to be sick and obliged to languish for years . . . to live a long time or to die soon, perhaps immediately; all must be accepted from God. If others have greater graces and gifts, we are happy in God. Our life must be like a great Amen which harmonises with that of the heavenly choirs . . ."

If we see the love of God in all things, in all happenings, and in all the troubles of life, nothing will upset us or cause us excessive anguish. We know that we are in good hands and that everything is arranged for our good.

2. Sometimes we fail to see God in all the events of life because we lack faith and absolute confidence in the Lord. We must try to increase this faith and live always in the presence of God, and we must regard the honour and glory of this world as worth absolutely nothing without God. *What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹

We often attach too much importance to the things of this world, which viewed in the light of eternity are worth very little. When we find ourselves at the point of death and think back over the events of life, how small these things will seem to us! Then we shall marvel at our folly and regret that we worried so much about them, while we allowed ourselves to forget the only being really necessary to us, God Himself. St.

Francis de Sales said that when we arrive at the end of life, the affairs with which we have been preoccupied will seem about as important as the sand-castles we built as children, castles which cost us a lot of trouble to build and a great deal of sorrow afterwards when they had been destroyed.

3. Are we in the habit of seeing all things in God and God in all things? Do we accept all things from His holy hands and do His will cheerfully and lovingly?

Do we try to control ourselves when God sends us sorrow as well as joy. If we find we are in need of reform in this matter, we should make good resolutions.

¹ Mt. 16, 26.

22nd September

DEPENDING ALWAYS ON JESUS

1. Virtue is difficult, and life holds more trials than consolations. Sometimes we feel discouraged because virtue seems impossible and we fall so often in spite of our best resolutions, or because our cross seems too heavy and we feel that we are overburdened.

Where will we find comfort in our sufferings and strength in our weakness? *Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*¹ Go to Jesus and depend always on Him.

Difficulties will be overcome, the cross will grow lighter, the pain will be less severe if we rely always on Jesus. Isaias, the Prophet, placed these words on the lips of God: *I have made you and I will bear: I will carry and I will save.*² At that time Jesus had not yet come; He was not yet present among us with His doctrine, with His consoling spirit, and with His Divine Eucharist. Now things are different; we have Emmanuel, God

with us. Why, therefore, do we not allow ourselves to be carried by Him? It is necessary for us to allow ourselves to be "carried by the grace of God,"³ as the *Imitation of Christ* puts it.

If God is with us, who or what can prevail against us?

We must, as St. Francis de Sales writes, lean on the arm of Jesus as the child leans securely on the arm of its mother. "It matters little," he adds, "where she walks, on a grassy plain or on a steep path surrounded by precipices." She is his mother and she carries him; that is enough to make him happy and content. We must trust Jesus in this way, relying always on His support in joy and in sorrow, in moments of trial and in moments of satisfaction, in life and in death. Let us not be afraid; Jesus is better and stronger than our earthly mother. If He guides and supports us, we can be sure of Heaven no matter what happens.

2. When we abandon ourselves to Jesus, we must do so cheerfully as well as trustingly. St. Basil calls the devil the angel of sadness. The evil spirit is, in fact, sad, for this is the lot of one who has lost God for ever. He wishes, moreover, to communicate that sadness to us also when he has drawn us into sin.

We should be happy in the Lord, as St. Paul exhorts. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He who possesses Jesus and His grace is touched by that holy joy which radiates from Him. The Saints were joyful in persecution and in martyrdom as the Apostles were before the Sanhedrin because *they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus*.⁴ It is related of St. Romauld that in spite of great austerities he was always smiling, so that he communicated happiness to those who saw him. Let us, therefore, rely always on Jesus; let us remain close to Him and the path to Heaven will seem smooth in spite of the many obstacles which we are sure to encounter.

3. We must continue to trust in Jesus even when we have been guilty of imperfection or of sin. Sin, according to St. Thomas, is the denial of love, and therefore of God Who is charity. It places a distance between God and the soul. Precisely

because of this, whenever we fall into sin or imperfection, we should return immediately to Jesus and ask Him to support us once more in our weakness. There is no need to be afraid. It was for this purpose that He became man, and suffered and died for love of us. We can be sure that whenever we return to Him in a spirit of repentance, He will receive us lovingly and will grant us forgiveness. He will support us with His omnipotent power so that we may not fall again.

¹ Mt. 11, 28.² Is. 46, 3.³ Imit. of Christ, Bk. II, c. 9.⁴ Acts 5, 41.

23rd September

CARELESSNESS

I. Some people think that they are good Christians because they avoid committing grave sin and more or less fulfil their duties. They do not entirely omit their prayers, but they are content to recite them listlessly.

They go to Mass on days of obligation, but they are afraid of arriving too early and so they are usually a little late. Once Mass is over, they leave the church as if it had gone on fire. During Mass, they are cold and distracted. They are like candlesticks without candles; their minds are absent, their hearts are mute.

In regard to their work or other obligations, any excuse suffices to escape or to leave a job half-done. It is useless to expect from them anything like fervour in prayer, attention to duty, or a spirit of sacrifice in the performance of good works.

Such people are only half-Christians. They do not wish to serve Satan, but they lack the generosity and the strength of will to become true sons of God.

Do you belong to this category? If your carelessness derives from a lack of appreciation of divine things and of your duty

in life, you can hardly avoid grave fault. If it comes from laziness, tepidity, or lack of mortification, there is no doubt but that you are close to mortal sin. Anyone who is negligent not alone disgusts men, but he is an object of loathing to God also and is running the risk of being abandoned by Him. We should examine ourselves seriously and if we discover this indifference in ourselves, we should shake off our lethargy and make good resolutions to love God more and to serve Him with greater fidelity and diligence. We should be ready, no matter how great the sacrifice, to avoid every imperfection and sin. Any offence against God can lead us nearer to eternal damnation.

2. Reflect on the infinite generosity of God, Who created us, redeemed us from sin by shedding the blood of His divine Son, and enriched our souls with graces and supernatural gifts. How can we remain indifferent and fail to correspond willingly with such goodness? Virtue cannot be achieved without diligence, and we cannot be true Christians without virtue. Let us consider the example given us by the Saints. They lived in a continual and prayerful union with God; they never refused any task or any sacrifice in order to show their love for Jesus and their total dedication to His will; they made every effort to attract others towards holiness and to bring about the triumph of the kingdom of Christ in the world. What are we doing? What are we prepared to do in future?

3. A zealous Christian, ordered in all things, always ready to do his duty and to promote his own spiritual welfare and that of his neighbour, is the source of great edification. Of him can be said what was written of Jesus Himself: *He has done all things well.*¹ The same must be true of us if we are to be genuine disciples of Jesus Christ.

There are many ways of helping ourselves to do our duty well and of increasing the fervour of our interior lives. (1) Live always in the presence of God. (2) Remember that nothing is insignificant in His eyes as long as it is done for Him. (3) Ask

Him insistently for His love, repeating with St. Francis of Assisi:
"My Lord, my God, my all!"

¹ Mk. 7, 37.

24th September

FUNDAMENTAL FACTS

I. *Life is passing.* The days chase one another; time is flying. Childhood has become a distant memory. Perhaps youth and manhood have also passed and gone and we find ourselves on the threshold of old age. All those days, months and years that have passed were gifts of God. He gave them to us for our benefit and sanctification. But what use have we made of them? Have we laid up treasure for eternal life? And if we have not done so up to now, for what are we waiting? Let us remember the old saying that we should never put off till tomorrow what we can do today. Today there is still time to turn from sin, regain sanctifying grace, and lead a life of Christian perfection. But tomorrow? What do we know about tomorrow? Tomorrow is in the hands of the Lord and we do not know if the Lord will grant us further time to make amends.

Do not say, therefore, that you will change tomorrow, that tomorrow you will turn away from the path of sin and begin to lead a holy life. For not alone does time pass, but it often betrays us. Our Lord tells us that the judgment will come at a time when we least expect it. The time that is gone will never return; the future is uncertain; there remains only the present. But the present is equally uncertain; it is something that passes, and every moment could be the last of our lives. How many whom we have known were taken away suddenly in the flower of their youth . . . Is that not a warning to us?

Let us do good while we have time; let us gain merit now for eternal life.

2. *Death is approaching.* How many years have we left? How many months? How many hours? We do not know. Perhaps this could be the last day or the last hour of our lives, and if that were true, in what state would we appear before the majesty of God? How terrible if we were in mortal sin; we would be damned for all eternity!

But even if we find ourselves in the state of grace, what merits have we to present to the eternal Judge? What sacrifices have we made to prove our love for Him? What mortifications and penances have we voluntarily undertaken to purify ourselves of our sins? What good works have we done, what alms have we given, what prayers have we said? We may have to admit that we have wasted most of the time which God has given us in useless or even sinful occupations. Let us treasure at least the years, days, or hours which God still wills to grant us for our full conversion and for our spiritual perfection.

3. *Eternity lies ahead.* Where the tree falls, there it will remain. So it will be with us. If we have to our credit works of virtue, and of apostolic labour, death will be for us, as it was for St. Francis of Assisi, the good sister who will release us from the bonds which tie us to this earth so that the soul can soar to its longed-for haven of everlasting joy in the company of God. But if we are so unfortunate at this last moment as to find ourselves in mortal sin, we shall be deprived for ever of the sight of God and, as a result, of every happiness. We shall be hurled into the eternal abyss where there is no light nor hope and where torments will have no end.

While there is still time, let us meditate on these truths.

25th September

FAITH AND HOPE

1. A man without the light of faith is like a blind man groping in the dark. The world which surrounds us is an inconceivable

absurdity unless we have faith in a God who creates and orders. Life is an aimless journey if it is not illuminated by faith in a Creator Who will reward us. Everything without us and within us speaks to us of God and directs our steps towards Him, our supreme benefactor, our judge, and our eternal reward. The stars of the heavens and the flowers of the fields tell us of the infinite beauty and goodness of their Creator. In the pages of the Gospel we find a clearer and more penetrating light which invites us to adore and love the divine Redeemer and to believe in Him, Who alone has the words of eternal life and Who alone can satisfy the infinite desires of our hearts.

All this is true. Everything around us and within us leads us to God and invites us to have faith. The virtue of faith, however, is a supernatural gift which we must humbly and perseveringly beg from God. It is, as St. Thomas says, the foundation of the entire spiritual life¹; without it the spiritual edifice would collapse. How thankful, therefore, we should be to God for having been called to the faith and for having been born in the Catholic Church. There are so many other souls outside Her, who grope in the darkness longing for the truth. We should pray for them that they may reach the port of salvation and may be able to join with us in praising, loving, and serving our Lord Jesus Christ. We should also be well aware that, as pointed out by St. James, faith without good works is dead.² Even the devils believe, as St. Augustine observes,³ but this does not help their salvation. Besides faith, the love of God and love of our neighbour are necessary. The result of this double charity should be a gradual increase in good works.

2. Christian hope derives from faith. When we believe in the infinitely good and merciful God Who was made man for us and who shed His Precious Blood for our salvation, we experience a great hope and a great confidence. No matter how numerous our sins and our defects, as long as we are sincerely repentant we should continue to hope for the forgiveness of God. Despair,

which led Judas to commit suicide, should never be allowed to enter our minds. Like the penitent Magdalen, like the prodigal son, like the lost sheep, and like the good thief, let us trust in Jesus with faith, hope, and sorrow for our sins. Let us remember that He is infinitely good and merciful and ardently desires to pardon us. Together with this hope of God's forgiveness, we should nurture the hope of gaining Heaven, which the Lord in His infinite goodness has promised not only to innocent souls but also to repentant sinners. In order that this hope may not be in vain, however, we should include in our repentance for our sins a firm purpose of amendment.

3. We should also have great confidence in the continual assistance which God offers us in the temptations, troubles, and trials of life. When we are strongly tempted, we should remember that God will not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength,⁴ and we should pray to Him for help. When pain torments us, when humiliations are hard to bear, when all is dark and we feel abandoned, let us trust in Him, Who is the way, the truth, and the life. He says to us, as He said to Peter floundering in the waves: *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*⁵ He is always ready to console and comfort us.

Let us remember that the more we hope for, the more we shall obtain.

¹ S. Th., III, q. 73, a. 3.

² Cf. James 2, 17-20.

³ De Caritate, 10.

⁴ Cf. I Cor. 10, 13.

⁵ Mt. 14, 31.

26th September

THE SACRIFICES OF LIFE

1. People make many sacrifices for the sake of the present life, to maintain health, to carve out a career, or to obtain money, success, and honours. If you are a student, what pains

you take to get a degree so that you can establish yourself in society. If you are a labourer, look at the efforts you must make to obtain the necessities of life. If you are a business executive, how you are prepared to strive and strain in order to do better than your colleagues and gain promotion!

If you become ill, you spare neither expense nor effort in order to regain your health. You are even prepared to undergo a surgical operation if that is necessary to save your life.

But how many sacrifices do we make in order to do good or to become holy? We know that the present life is short and is only the forerunner of the true life, which is eternal. We should be able, then, to appreciate the profundity of this question of Jesus Christ:—*What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹

We are not forbidden to pay attention to worldly affairs. Very often, it is our duty to do so. But our first concern must always be to save our souls and those of our neighbours, because it was for this that God created us.

With this aim in mind, we should be prepared not only to make greater sacrifices than we make for the sake of our material welfare, but we should be prepared to die rather than offend God and expose ourselves to the danger of eternal damnation.

Let us reflect. What sacrifices have we made so far for our own sanctification and for the sanctification of others? What sacrifices do we propose to make in the near future?

2. When we say that we must be prepared to make any sacrifice, even to die, rather than offend God and risk eternal damnation, we mean exactly what we say. *If thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, Jesus says in the Gospel, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be thrown into hell. And if thy right hand is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should be lost than that thy whole body should go into hell.*²

We are prepared to do all this when there is a question of preserving mortal life; we are prepared to undergo an amputation in order to avoid death. Are we prepared to do as much for eternal salvation?

Sometimes when we wish to set ourselves free from the danger of sin, we must deprive ourselves of things that are dear to us; we must suppress our natural instincts and affections, and we must impose on ourselves severe penances and bodily mortifications. All this is demanded from us by Jesus in these words which seem hard and almost cruel, but are none other than a just and necessary commandment. In certain grave cases, heroism is necessary for all.

3. The Saints looked for mortifications, sacrifices, and humiliations; they desired to suffer to show their love for Jesus and to conquer the disorderly inclinations of their bodies. By setting out on the way of penance and of the cross, they purified themselves and reached the summit of sanctity, step by step. What sacrifices and mortifications are we prepared to undertake? Remember that there are two things which we are obliged to do. (1) We must accept patiently from the hands of God all the sorrows, troubles and crosses which He sends us. (2) We must be prepared to take up our cross voluntarily and generously, at least when we realise that it is necessary or profitable for our salvation and sanctification.

¹ Mt. 16, 26.

² Mt. 5, 29-30.

27th September

PRUDENCE AND SIMPLICITY

1. Prudence is one of the cardinal virtues frequently recommended in the Sacred Scriptures. *If you receive my words and*

*treasure my commands, the Holy Spirit tells us in the Book of Proverbs, turning your ear to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding . . . if you seek her like silver, and like hidden treasures search her out: then you will understand the fear of the Lord: the knowledge of God you will find.*¹ Then, He promises, God will counsel and protect you, *for wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will please your soul, discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you; saving you from the way of evil men.*²

The word 'prudence,' as St. Thomas explains, is derived from the word 'providence,' and it consists in ordering everything correctly towards its proper end.³ From that we can see how necessary this virtue is. A man who can order everything correctly towards its own end, does everything as it ought to be done. He will have achieved true wisdom, which is the foundation of sanctity.

To speak when we should speak; to be silent when we should be silent; never to leave unsaid what ought to be said, but to know when we should speak, and how much; to pay attention mainly to necessary things, that is, to God and to the supernatural; to avoid every thought which would separate us from God and endanger our salvation; to love God more than anything else and more than ourselves, because He is the supreme good and our supreme happiness; to love other things only in God and for Him solely; to direct all our actions proportionately towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves, and to avoid every act which would alienate us from God, which would be contrary to His precepts, or which would endanger our eternal salvation.

All this is true prudence, which is founded on divine wisdom and must be continually nourished by the grace of God and inspired by charity. Since this virtue pervades and embraces all the others, a man who achieves perfection in it has reached the peak of holiness.

But perhaps we are too preoccupied with worldly interests, and so stray from the straight path which leads to God and to sanctity.

2. Apart from the Christian virtue of prudence, there is also the prudence of the world and of the flesh. This, however, as St. Francis de Sales explains, is really duplicity and craft; it does not avoid dissimulation and falsehood; it seeks its own profit only and is prepared to obtain its end by any means. "I know nothing at all about the art of falsehood, dissimulation, and pretence," St. Francis wrote to the Bishop of Belley, "which is the centre of political activity and the mainspring of human prudence. That which I have on my lips I have in my heart. I hate duplicity like death."⁴ Our prudence should likewise be united with rectitude, sincerity, and simplicity. We must speak the truth with charity and never lie or deceive. *For we can do nothing against the truth, says St. Paul, but only for the truth.*⁵ He advises the Ephesians *to practise the truth in love.*⁶ To the Romans he writes: *I would have you wise as to what is good, and guileless as to what is evil.*⁷ The virtue of Christian prudence, then, consists in complete exactitude in all that is good combined with a holy simplicity free from any taint of duplicity or evil.

3. *Be therefore wise as serpents, Jesus directs us in the Gospel, and guileless as doves.*⁸ We must be prudent, but also simple and straightforward.

St. Francis de Sales comments on these words of the Gospel. "A white dove is more pleasing than a serpent. Should we try to combine their gifts, we could not transfer the simplicity of the dove to the serpent, because he would still be a serpent; but it would be easier to bestow the prudence of the serpent on the dove, because in doing so the dove would not cease to be beautiful. Let us therefore embrace this holy simplicity, which is the sister of innocence and the daughter of charity."⁹

Christian prudence must always be united with holy simplicity, which is an ornament to the soul.

¹ Prov. 2, 2-6. ² Cf. Ibid. 2, 2-12. ³ S. Th. II-II, q. 49, a. 6.

⁴ Letters of St. Francis de Sales (Spirito), Bk. II, c. 24. Letter 178.

⁵ 2 Cor. 13, 8. ⁶ Eph. 4, 15. ⁷ Rom. 16, 19. ⁸ Matt. 10, 16.

⁹ Letter 119.

28th September

GOODNESS AND CHRISTIAN COURTESY

1. Christian perfection, when it is genuine and practical, should be reflected externally in our appearance, in our conversation, and in our behaviour. Discourtesy, sharpness of manner, offensive speech, and all that is rude or displeasing, are signs that we are lacking or weak in virtue.

On the other hand, if we have succeeded in conquering all our evil inclinations and in regulating our interior faculties, so that they are subject to right reason and to the divine law, then our virtue will be reflected in our speech and in our actions. It was this spiritual charm that made the Saints fascinating to those who knew them or came in contact with them, making them wish to reform their own lives and to strive towards perfection. St. Francis de Sales said that courtesy is the frame of sanctity; as a picture without a frame is incomplete, so also is virtue if it is not expressed externally by affability and gentleness. In the Gospel, Jesus is not satisfied with interior virtue alone but insists that it should appear outwardly in our actions. *Even let your light shine before men*, He says, *in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*¹

2. St. Francis de Sales was a model of gentleness and Christian courtesy. He had every regard and respect of his neighbour because he saw God in everyone and everyone in God.

He had the ability to listen to everybody with great patience and kindness, without ever showing any sign of tiredness or boredom, even when he was dealing with unpleasant people or

when he was busy with far more important matters. He maintained his equilibrium and self-control even after many hours of work and of difficult consultations. He was always prepared, moreover, to listen to the troubles of the poor.

Even when insulted and reviled, he displayed perfect serenity and calm. It was as a result of this that, with the help of God, he made innumerable converts.

"Always be as gentle as you can," he was accustomed to advise, "and remember that you will catch more flies with a spoon of honey than with a barrel of vinegar. If you must err, let it be on the side of gentleness . . ." "Be humble," he wrote again, "and you will be gentle. Humility makes the heart kind towards the perfect and the imperfect; towards the former through veneration, towards the latter through compassion."² How much we have to learn from the serenity and courtesy of this Saint!

3. When Jesus wished to propose Himself as our divine model, He said: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*³ He was kind to all, but especially to sinners. He was strict and severe only with hypocrites, whom He described as a race of vipers and as whitened sepulchres, from which we can see how much He detested duplicity. If the hypocrites had only repented and resolved to mend their ways, however, Our Lord would have received them lovingly and pardoned them. Let us learn, therefore, to be simple, meek, and humble of heart and to display that courtesy of manner which is the necessary adornment of true Christian virtue.

¹ Mt. 5, 16.

² Letter 51.

³ Mt. 11, 29.

29th September

FREQUENT CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

I. Among the most efficacious means of self-sanctification are frequent Confession and Holy Communion. Confession purifies

the soul of sin, into which unfortunately we continue to fall, and confers sacramental grace, through which we are fortified against the assaults of the devil. It also gives us an opportunity of being guided on the right road by our Confessor, who knows our secret failings and will give us in God's name words of encouragement, comfort, and spiritual direction. We should frequently receive this sacrament of God's mercy; in fact, those who are striving after holiness should go to confession every week or at least every fortnight. Even if we have not committed grave sin, when we examine ourselves before God we shall find many faults and failings. The Holy Spirit reminds us that even the just man sins seven times a day, which means many times. *The just man falls seven times.*¹ *If we say that we have no sin,* writes St. John, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*² Since, then, we are all poor sinners and Jesus in His infinite goodness has given us this means of purifying our souls, we should not neglect to use it to remain in the state of grace. Frequent confession is not difficult. On the contrary, if we have the proper disposition, it can be a great comfort and consolation to us. There is no greater solace than to possess the grace of God and to be pure and free from all sin. Furthermore, by remaining in venial sin we are in danger of drifting gradually into more grievous sin and into a state of tepidity, which is so dangerous as well as so displeasing to God.

2. Frequent confession keeps us prepared for a good and holy death. We do not know when our lives will end, and therefore it is necessary to keep ourselves pure and free from sin in the sight of God. We know that death will come to us when we least expect it, as the Gospel assures us, and it will come like a thief. It is necessary to be always ready for the great encounter with our Eternal Judge. In that way the natural fear of death will be diminished. Being free from sin through the infinite mercy of God, we shall face with greater courage the journey into eternity and we shall realise that the good sister Death has

come to release us from bondage and to save us from the danger of ever offending God again.

3. The purifying and reforming action of frequent Confession is completed by the practice of receiving Communion as frequently as possible.

Sacramental Confession gives us the grace of God, while Holy Communion gives us the Author of that grace, Jesus Christ, living and really present, Who comes to dwell in our poor hearts. How can anybody who goes frequently to Confession and Communion commit sin? How can any man cast himself once more into the clutches of the devil after experiencing the heavenly consolation of the Eucharist? Do not protest that we are not worthy to go to Holy Communion frequently . . . It is true that we are not worthy, but we have a great need of this divine nourishment. If we wait until we are worthy, we shall never approach the Sacred Banquet; but if we realise our need of Jesus, we shall want to receive Him every day. This was the practice of the early Christians, who were persevering in prayer and in the 'Breaking of Bread,' that is, in receiving Holy Communion. From the Divine Eucharist they gained the courage to endure martyrdom. A good life is a slow martyrdom; we who must be virtuous have a continual need of Holy Communion, the food of the strong.

¹ Prov. 24, 16.

² 1 John 1, 8.

30th September

CHRISTIAN MODESTY

1. We are told that one day in the presence of St. Francis de Sales the beauty of a certain noble lady, his cousin, was being described.¹ The Saint observed with simplicity: "I've heard this said by others also." Somebody remarked that he himself often

saw this young relative of his and therefore there was no need for others to tell him about her. The Saint replied with the same holy simplicity: "It is true that I see her often, but I never stare at her." This simple but wise reply underlines the difference between seeing and looking.

We are often obliged, in the ordinary course of living or by reason of our position, to see many things which could be dangerous to our spiritual welfare. There are many ugly things around us, although sometimes externally beautiful, which we cannot help seeing. At home, on the street, in society, almost everywhere, we meet persons and things which constitute a threat to our virtue. What are we to do? We must see, because very often we cannot help it, but we must never stare.

In other words, we should never fix our eyes on anything which would seriously disturb us. If we experience the beginnings of any such disturbance we should look elsewhere at once, raising our minds to God in silent prayer. Delay could cost us our purity. To guard it we need the holy virtue of modesty, which St. Thomas calls the moderating virtue.² Not only, the Angelic Doctor observes, does it moderate, but it also directs our internal actions as well as our external ones, in such a way that he who possesses this beautiful virtue has perfect control over his outward behaviour and over his inward dispositions.

2. It follows from the doctrine of St. Thomas that modesty has two aspects, internal and external.

The former, which is the foundation of the latter, consists in a firm resolution, relying on divine grace, of preserving constant self-control, so that it will be impossible to think or do anything contrary to the law of God. Since everything in us will be directed towards God, it will be impossible for us to be led astray through the lower impulses of the flesh or through the external appearances of persons and objects surrounding us. Once the virtue of modesty has been perfectly developed, the control which we exercise over our interior faculties will be

reflected in our external behaviour. This outward expression is the necessary complement of interior modesty. Let us examine ourselves and see if we are really modest, both internally and externally, for this lovely virtue is the most solid foundation and the best safeguard of sanctity.

3. The virtue of modesty is necessary in that it regulates all our actions, internal and external, and saves us from everything which threatens the purity of our souls. It is also an inspiring example to the people around us. The Saints often converted sinners and incited others to lead better lives simply because their conduct proclaimed their purity and sanctity. We should endeavour to do the same, without affectation however, but in a simple and natural manner. The continual mastery which we exercise over our interior and exterior faculties should be reflected in our appearance, in our conversation, and in all our actions.

¹ Spirito, P. VII, c. 10.

² S. Th., II-II, q. 160, a. 1.

³ S. Th., II-II, q. 160, a. 2.

OCTOBER

1st October

THE MONTH OF THE HOLY ROSARY

1. We should say the Rosary devoutly every day. This beautiful prayer is very pleasing to Our Lady, and the Church is particularly anxious that we should recite it during the month of October. Families which say the Holy Rosary together can hope for a special blessing from God and for the maternal protection of Mary.

If possible, every family should gather together in the evening and recite the Rosary before an image of our Blessed Mother. If the parents set an example, their children will join them. It is consoling to come together after the toil and trouble of the day in order to confide our cares and hopes to Mary.

Do you say the Rosary every day? If you have neglected this pious practice, begin today. Do not plead lack of time. There is time for so many other things, so surely there is time to pray and to entrust ourselves in a special way to the protection of our heavenly Mother? The practice of reciting the Holy Rosary will win for you the blessing of God and the patronage of the Blessed Virgin.

2. One of the main advantages of the Rosary is that it enables us to unite with our vocal prayer meditation on the principal mysteries of our faith. During each decade we should meditate briefly on one of these mysteries. In this way our faith will be enlivened and we shall be roused to imitate in our lives the example of Jesus and Mary.

The Rosary is composed of the Church's most beautiful prayers—the Our Father, which Jesus Himself taught us to say

when addressing our heavenly Father, and the Hail Mary, which consists of the Angel's greeting to the Blessed Virgin when he came to announce to her that she was to be the Mother of God, of the inspired words of St. Elizabeth on the occasion of the Visitation, and of the moving plea for mercy, both now and at the hour of our death, which the Church places upon the lips of her sinful children. Each decade concludes with the short hymn of praise in honour of the Blessed Trinity: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." This prayer expresses the two principal mysteries of our faith, namely, the unity and trinity of God, and, in an indirect fashion, the incarnation of the Second Divine Person.

If we think of all this when we are fervently reciting the Rosary, it will prove to be a treasury of grace.

3. It is untrue to say that the Rosary is a monotonous prayer in that it necessitates a constant repetition of the same formulae. In the first place, recitation of these prayers should be accompanied by meditation on the principal mysteries of our religion. Secondly, if we are inspired by love, the repetition of the same words can draw from them each time a new significance. The Christian who loves God and His Divine Mother will be happy to call upon his heavenly Father with filial confidence and to pray to the Blessed Virgin with trust in her maternal protection. An affectionate son does not find it boring to speak with his own mother.

2nd October

OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS

1. Among the many expressions of God's goodness towards us is His designation of a heavenly spirit to accompany and to

assist each of us on our journey through life. The human eye cannot see him, because he is always on guard by our side. Even while he is near us he enjoys the beatific vision of God.

This is a wonderful thought. During the day, when we are preoccupied with so many affairs which can cause us to forget God, our angel is beside us to inspire us to love God more. When we are asleep, he is watching over us and praying for our welfare. When we pray, he gathers our feeble supplications and offers them to God. When temptation presses hard, it is he who sustains us and encourages us to resist with Christian fortitude. Finally, when by some misfortune we fall into grave sin because we have been deaf to the appeals of our Creator, he takes pity on us and inspires in us remorse for our misdeeds and the desire to be restored as soon as possible to God's favour.

We should be deeply grateful to our kind Guardian Angel and should pray to him often, especially in times of spiritual or bodily danger. We need his help when we are tempted or afflicted. We should place much greater trust in him, remembering that he is always close at hand to fulfil the mission entrusted to him by God of enlightening and directing us.

2. The realisation that our Angel Guardian is always close at hand should also be a warning to us. It should prevent us from doing anything displeasing to God. Would we venture to do anything unbecoming in the presence of our father or mother, or of anyone for whom we have any regard? Definitely not, and still less should we dare to perform an evil action in the presence of our Angel, to whom we owe such gratitude, and in the presence of God, our Creator, Lord and Redeemer, Who could at any moment snap the thread which binds us to life and plunge us into eternity. Furthermore, when pride convinces us that we are of some importance, let us turn to our Angel and pray for the virtue of humility. When we begin to seethe with anger and long to utter words which are harsh and injurious, let us ask him for the gift of Christian gentleness. When the

devil fills our minds with impure images and thoughts, let us ask our Angel to beseech God to give us the Christian fortitude to resist temptation and to imitate his angelic purity. Finally, when tepidity is sapping the vigour of our interior life, let us pray to our Guardian Angel in the hope of obtaining a share in his intimate union with God.

3. Let us form the habit of saying this prayer to our Guardian Angel, especially in the crises of life:

“O Angel of God, my Guardian dear,
To whom God’s love commits me here,
Ever this day (or night) be at my side
To light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.”

When there is not enough time to say this prayer, let us at least turn to our Angel with an act of faith and love and say: “My Guardian Angel, enlighten me. My Guardian Angel, help me. My Guardian Angel, protect me.”

He will certainly come to our assistance and will implore for us from God the graces which we need.

3rd October

THE FIRST JOYFUL MYSTERY OF THE ROSARY

The Annunciation

1. The Rosary is both a vocal and a mental prayer. When reciting the first five decades, we should meditate on the principal joyful mysteries of our faith, beginning with the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin. In other words, during the first decade we should visualise the scene described in the Gospel.

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, and the Virgin's name was Mary. And when the Angel had come to her, he said "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women."¹

Note the manner in which the Angel greets Mary. He proclaims that she is full of grace, pleasing and acceptable to God. He bows before her and says that she is blessed among women. On previous occasions Angels had appeared to Patriarchs, Kings, and Prophets, but always as superior beings bearing a command from Almighty God. Why, then, does an Angel bow before this maiden and salute her with such reverence? The reason is twofold. Mary is the purest of creatures, immaculate from the moment of her conception; she is also destined to become the Mother of God, a destiny of quasi-infinite dignity. Let us poor sinners bow before her also and beg her to obtain for us from God the graces of forgiveness and of sanctification. It is in this spirit of loving humility that we should recite the first decade of the Holy Rosary.

2. Consider now Mary's reaction to the reverence and praise with which the Angel greets her. Is she carried away by delight and exaltation at this solemn moment? Nothing of the sort. In her humility and modesty she is disturbed by the Angel's salutation and wonders what is the reason for it. *She was troubled at his word, and kept pondering what manner of greeting this might be.*²

How do we behave when we receive praise from our superiors or from our friends and acquaintances? We are pleased, and overcome perhaps by feelings of vanity. We smile to ourselves and are convinced that we are of more consequence than we are. We even feel the need to reveal our thoughts to others. There is a world of difference between the simplicity and humility of the Blessed Virgin and our vain hunger for praise and honour.

3. The Angel reassures Mary. *Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God . . .*³ *Thou shalt conceive in thy womb*

*and shalt bring forth a son . . . Jesus . . . the Son of the Most High . . . the Son of God.*⁴

The Virgin remains humble and thoughtful. She asks frankly how she can become the Mother of God when she has resolved to remain a virgin for the rest of her life. The Angel reveals to her the tremendous mystery by which the Holy Spirit will descend on her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her.

Only when Mary understood that this was the will of God, and that the privilege of the divine Motherhood would be compatible with the other privilege of virginal purity, did she utter the momentous words: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word.*⁵

Let us bow our proud heads before the Virgin, the humblest and most exalted of creatures.⁶ Let us learn from her to love purity above all things and to be prepared to make any sacrifice rather than lose this beautiful virtue.

¹ Luke 1, 26-28.

² Luke 1, 29.

³ Luke 1, 30.

⁴ Cf. Luke 1, 31-36.

⁵ Luke 1, 38.

⁶ Dante, Par. XXXIII, 2-3.

4th October

THE SECOND JOYFUL MYSTERY

Mary's Visit to St. Elizabeth

I. When the Angel had told Mary that she had been chosen to be the Mother of God, he proceeded to reveal also the imminent birth of the Precursor of Jesus Christ. Her cousin, Elizabeth, he told her, who had been sterile for such a long time, would soon have the joy of bearing a son. When the Blessed Virgin heard this good news, she set out on a long and difficult journey in order to congratulate her cousin.

The devout soul is always motivated by charity and pays no attention to difficulties or obstacles because the grace of God possesses it completely. We also have received, and continue to receive, many graces from our Creator. We were nothing, and God gave us being. We were in darkness, and He gave us the light of faith. We were slaves of sin, and Jesus Christ broke the bonds in which the devil held us and gave us the freedom of the children of God. We were exiles on this earth and God became our companion and our guide. We hungered for the supernatural, and He nourished us with the divine Bread in which He gave Himself to us completely.

2. But are we as grateful to God as we ought to be! Do we correspond with His graces? Are we prepared to make any sacrifice in order to share with others the gifts with which He has enriched us?

Let us remember that gratitude is a virtue which is very pleasing to God and draws down on us other graces and gifts.

In his panegyric on Trajan the younger Pliny observes that the best means of soliciting new favours is to show gratitude for those which we have already received. On the other hand, as St. Bernard points out, ingratitude is like a scorching wind which dries up the dew of divine mercy.¹ Let us be grateful to God, therefore, and do our best to share with others the gifts which we have received.

3. As soon as Mary entered her cousin's house, Elizabeth was inspired by the Holy Spirit and felt the infant in her womb leaping with joy in the holy presence of Jesus and His Mother. *Blessed are thou among women, she cried out, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! And how have I deserved that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?*² Then the Blessed Virgin in her joy and gratitude gave utterance to the Magnificat. This expression of her happiness was interwoven, however, with sentiments of deep humility.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; Because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name; And his mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. 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. 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 for ever.³

If at that moment they could have heard the words of this poor and unknown girl, what would the mighty Emperor, Caesar Augustus, or the petty King, Herod, have said? Yet history is there to demonstrate the astounding truth of these prophetic words. Generations of yesterday and of today have bowed in reverence before this simple maiden, while one after another rulers have been tumbling from their thrones. Let us honour the Blessed Virgin also and learn from her to love humility and holiness.

¹ Serm. 52 in Cant.

² Luke 1, 42-43.

³ Luke 1, 46-55.

5th October

THE THIRD JOYFUL MYSTERY

The Birth of Jesus

I. When God became man in order to instruct and redeem the lost and erring human race, the gesture would have been deprived of its real significance if He had chosen to be born in

a palace, surrounded by the passing splendour of worldly glory and wealth.

It would have been meaningless not only for God, but also for us, if He had abandoned the imperishable glory of Heaven and the infinite wealth of everlasting happiness in order to assume the kind of earthly grandeur which in His eyes is but a vanishing cloud. What we needed was to learn the way of humility and of detachment from worldly things, which can so easily lead us to forget the supernatural. We needed someone to come and sanctify suffering, which purifies and elevates the soul. We needed someone to appease divine justice on our behalf and to teach us that the way of the cross is the only one which can lead to Heaven. This was why the Eternal Word of God became a poor and lowly infant, choosing a stable rather than a palace, and the little village of Bethlehem in Judea in preference to the imperial city of Rome. He wished His extreme poverty and deprivation to be His first lesson to mankind.

2. Like the simple shepherds, let us prostrate ourselves with faith and with love before the manger. Let us offer as our gifts our good resolutions; let us offer our hearts and ask God to change them and make them entirely His for ever.

Quite suddenly, the darkness of the night and the wretchedness of the cave were illuminated by a bright light from Heaven. While men were unaware of, or indifferent to, the miraculous event which had taken place, bands of Angels descended from Heaven and sang: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will.*¹ Joseph bent over the divine Infant and silently adored Him, while the Blessed Virgin knelt at His feet in loving contemplation.

3. Let us, too, learn to adore and love Him as His Mother and foster-father did. Let us love Him, that is, with a contemplative love, not distracted by worldly affairs; with a humble love, because we owe everything to Him, without whom we are

nothing but miserable sinners; with a sympathetic love, because we know that He suffered for us and spent Himself for our eternal salvation; and lastly, with a love which is entirely dedicated. After all, if He loved us so much that He gave Himself entirely for us, it is only just that in our love for Him we should sacrifice ourselves completely. All our thoughts, affections, and actions should be offered to Him with purity of intention and with a firm resolution of living in accordance with His holy will.

¹ Luke 2, 13-14.

6th October

THE FOURTH JOYFUL MYSTERY

The Purification of Our Lady and the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple

1. Since the fall of our first parents, human mothers have carried in their wombs souls dead to grace and have given birth to children stained with sin. Therefore it is necessary for the waters of Baptism to confer on these infants a second life, the supernatural life. A ceremony of purification is also required for these mothers, a rite which was of obligation under the Old Law, but under the New Law remains only as a pious custom.

The Blessed Virgin was not subject to the rule of sin. By a special privilege she was preserved free from the stain of original sin and was created and conceived in the fulness of grace. Moreover, she became a mother not by any human agency but by the power of the Holy Spirit, which preserved intact her angelic virginity. For this reason Mary was not bound by the Mosaic law which laid down the ceremony of purification as necessary for all mothers. Nevertheless, in order to give us an example of

humility and of absolute obedience to the law of God, she chose to fulfil this sacred rite.

How well do we comply with the law of God, with the precepts of the Church, and with the commands of our superiors who represent divine authority? Perhaps we excuse ourselves too easily from our obligations. Perhaps we are not sufficiently ready to give good example to others. We may evade the sacrifices which our duty demands of us, or we may fail to see God in the person who gives us our instructions.

Let us learn from the Blessed Virgin. Even when she was not obliged to do so, she obeyed the law and gave us a wonderful example of humility and submission to Almighty God.

2. Then Joseph and Mary carried the Infant Jesus to the Temple to offer Him to God and to buy Him back as their first-born son with the price paid by the poor, namely, with a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons. Let us reflect on this new act of humility on the part of the Holy Family. In spite of the supreme dignity which had been accorded them, they submitted quietly to the law which bound those in poverty and in sin. We who are so fond of money and of ostentation have much to learn from this scene. Jesus, the God-Man, is purchased back as a sinner for two young pigeons. Mary, the immaculate virgin and mother, and Joseph, the holiest and noblest of men, make themselves subject to the law of sin. We can derive from this lessons in humility and in detachment.

3. During the ceremony a devout man, enlightened by God, entered the temple. He asked and obtained the privilege of holding the divine Infant in his arms. This was Simeon, a holy old man to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed that before he died he would see the expected Messiah, the Redeemer of the sinful human race. Overjoyed as he held Jesus in his arms, he exclaimed: *Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace.*¹

May God grant that when we come to the end of our mortal

lives we may also have the pleasure of clasping Jesus to our hearts. Then we can say with confidence in God's mercy: Receive thy servant in peace, O Lord. Forgive him and receive him into everlasting happiness.

¹ Luke 2, 29.

7th October

THE FIFTH JOYFUL MYSTERY

The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

1. Mary and Joseph came according to custom to celebrate the feast of the Pasch in Jerusalem. They took with them Jesus, Who was now twelve years of age. When the feast was over, the pilgrims came together to return to Nazareth. As usual, they gathered in the temple to say a final prayer and then divided into two companies, one consisting of men, the other of women. The children were assigned to either caravan.

At any rate, when the two groups came together for the night after a day's journey, Mary and Joseph looked in vain for Jesus. He could not be found in either caravan. We can imagine how they suffered. However, they returned without delay to Jerusalem to look for their Child. They searched for three days. At last, when they went into the Temple to pour out their troubles to God, they found Jesus sitting among the doctors, who were amazed at the wisdom of his answers and of his questions. There was joy and sorrow in Mary's countenance as she regarded Him. Son, she said gently, *why hast thou done so to us? Behold, in sorrow thy father and I have been seeking thee.* Jesus' reply was also mild and at the same time mysterious. *How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*

Then He returned with them to Nazareth, where He remained *subject to them*. But His mother, we are told, *kept all these things carefully in her heart*.¹

This mystery of the Rosary is at the same time joyful and sorrowful. We can learn a good deal by meditating on it. We can admire the divine wisdom of Jesus, Who even from childhood desired to reveal a little of the truth, and also His obedience to Mary and Joseph until He reached thirty years of age. We can admire, too, His hidden life in the workshop in Nazareth, interrupted only by this brief demonstration of His divinity; and the anxiety of Mary and Joseph to find Jesus when they had lost Him, as well as their delight when He was restored to them.

2. If we should ever have the great misfortune of losing Jesus, let us have recourse at once to Mary and Joseph, who lost Him without any fault on their part, searched anxiously for Him, and did not rest until they had found Him.

To search for Jesus is the principal obligation of the soul, to find Him is its highest happiness. If we are without Jesus, our minds are in darkness and scarred with false ideas. Separated from Him, our hearts are filled with remorse, emptiness, and yearning. Only when Jesus is with us have life and death any meaning. Then we can set our journey towards the unfading star of Christian hope.

When Jesus had promised to give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, He saw that his listeners were going away scandalised. *Do you also wish to go away?* He asked His Apostles. *Lord*, replied St. Peter, *to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life*.²

3. By mortal sin we lose Jesus, and we lose our peace of soul. By venial sin we put Jesus farther away from us. For this reason we should not only avoid mortal sin, which leads to spiritual misery, but also venial sin, which diminishes our charity and weakens our spiritual life. We should, moreover, have com-

passion for poor sinners, who are our own brothers and are supremely unhappy, even if they may not realise it. We should pray a great deal for them, so that they may soon return to Jesus, Whom they have lost.

We should ask the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph to intercede for sinners so that they may return for ever to the merciful embrace of their divine Redeemer.

¹ Cf. Luke 2, 41-51.

² John 6, 69.

8th October

THE FIRST SORROWFUL MYSTERY

The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

I. The life of Mary, like that of her divine Son, was a life of suffering and of sacrifice.

When Simeon held the divine Child in his arms, he had prophesied: *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.*¹ There was suffering from the very beginning—in the arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfil the obligation of the census; in the refusal of the people of Bethlehem to give shelter to the Holy Family; in the birth of Jesus in a cold cave; in the flight into Egypt to escape from the cruelty of Herod; in the loss of Jesus when He was twelve years old; in the hard life of a humble artisan in Nazareth; in the difficulties of the public life of Jesus; and in the final tragedy which brought Jesus from Gethsemane to Calvary, and from Calvary to the sepulchre.

When faced with this spectacle of the Man-God and of His Mother Mary suffering for love of us, how can we complain

that our own cross is too heavy? How can we rebel against the merciful God Who afflicts us for our own good, purifies us with suffering, and demands that we should be detached from worldly things so that we may give more thought to Heaven, for which our souls are destined? To meditate on all that Jesus and Mary suffered for us should be enough to make us embrace our cross generously and resign ourselves to the physical or moral afflictions which God sends us.

2. Let us pay particular attention to the scene in Gethsemane. Jesus is lying prostrate on the ground. He has given everything for sinful humanity. He has given His heavenly teaching, His miracles, and His mercy. Even more, He has given Himself in the Blessed Eucharist, which He has instituted in the form of food and drink to sustain men on their earthly journey.

Now He lies prostrate in prayer. Near Him are His Apostles who, already forgetful of the immense favours which they have received, are asleep.

Not far away there is another Apostle, Judas, who has sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver as a slave would be sold, and is about to deliver Him to His executioners. But Jesus can see across the centuries many other Judases, so many traitors who will deny Him, so many sinners who will offend Him, so many who will be indifferent and sleep, never thinking of Him, and neglecting to make any return for His infinite love. His passion is beginning now, and will be protracted throughout the centuries. Before His crucifixion, He drinks the bitter chalice of human ingratitude, and in His tremendous agony He perspires drops of blood.

3. To which group do you belong, you who claim to be a Christian? Are you among the traitors who by their sins crucify Jesus anew? Weep for your faults and ask your merciful Redeemer for forgiveness and for the strength never to fall again.

Perhaps you are ungrateful and asleep? Awake from your

torpor. Pray to the Sorrowing Virgin to obtain for you the love of her divine Son and the ardent desire of following Him in the path of sacrifice and of virtue.

¹ Cf. Luke 2, 35.

9th October

THE SECOND SORROWFUL MYSTERY

The Scourging

I. Think about the manner in which Jesus was scourged. His chaste body is stripped by the jeering soldiers, His hands are tied and He is bound to a pillar. The soldiers come forward with their whips and begin to beat Him mercilessly. As His blood flows freely to the ground, Jesus quivers with pain and emits a half-suppressed groan. But fresh blows continue to rain down on His bruised flesh. So the prophecy is fulfilled in which Isaias described the punishment of the chosen people, whose sins and whose chastisement the divine Redeemer has chosen to take on Himself. *From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores . . .*¹

By means of this fearful torment Jesus willed to offer satisfaction in a special manner for the sins of the flesh. In ancient times sins of impurity provoked the anger of God so much that they were blotted out by the universal deluge. Now these sins are still numberless both in the pagan and, unfortunately, in the Christian world, but they are washed away by the saving blood of Jesus Christ, Who came on earth to make reparation for all the iniquities of men.

Kiss the wounds of Jesus, bleeding and suffering. Ask for pardon if you have on occasions failed to preserve the purity of

your body, the dwelling of your immortal soul and the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Resolve to die rather than stain again with impurity the soul which was redeemed and sanctified by the precious blood of the Redeemer.

2. The Saints voluntarily imposed on themselves floggings and other severe penances, which would make us shudder in modern times, in order to control their bodily impulses and to expiate along with Jesus the sins of their fellow-men. Today the pleasure-loving world cries out against such barbaric folly and extravagance. But you who are a Christian, educated in the school of Christ crucified, know that suffering has a mission in your life, that mortification is necessary for the control of the body.

We must make sacrifices in order to combat our evil impulses. We should avoid weakness and self-indulgence. Let us always remember that we are followers of Christ crucified and should therefore be prepared to chastise our bodies, even to the point of undergoing martyrdom, if this is necessary in order to avoid sin and to preserve our chastity.

3. Tradition holds that Mary followed Jesus through the various stages of His passion. It is impossible to believe that she would have abandoned Him in these tragic hours. She must at least have known of the cruel flogging which He endured, and while His body was being torn by the lashes she was, most probably, not far away, participating by her maternal sorrow in her Son's torment. Here, then, was a double martyrdom—the martyrdom of blood and the martyrdom of tears. Life demands the shedding of blood and the shedding of tears.

What are the motives which cause you sorrow in life? Are yours the tears of unsated ambition, of frustrated caprice, or of discouragement in time of trouble? Such tears are not worthy of a Christian. His should be tears of repentance for his sins and tears of love for Jesus and Mary.

¹ *Isaias* 1, 6.

Tenth October

THE THIRD SORROWFUL MYSTERY

The Crowning with Thorns

1. Having had Jesus flogged in spite of the fact that he believed in His innocence, Pilate showed Him to the mob in the vain hope that, when they had seen His bleeding body, their hatred would be appeased. It was no use. The enraged crowd kept crying: *Crucify him!*¹ Then Pilate, with a shameful gesture of open injustice, abandoned Jesus to the will of the Jewish executioners. *Jesus he delivered to their will.*²

It was probably before Pilate showed Him to the mob for the second time³ that the sad scene of the crowning with thorns took place. *The soldiers led him away into the courtyard of the praetorium, and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in purple, and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon him, and began to greet him, "Hail King of the Jews!" And they kept striking him on the head with a reed, and spitting upon him; and bending their knees, they did homage to him.*⁴

This new torture was a diabolical invention decreed by no law or authority. Purely for their own savage entertainment, the soldiers procured a bundle of thorned reeds which they wound into the shape of a crown and pressed into Jesus' head.

Mary knew what was going on. She was there with the holy women when Pilate brought her bloodstained Son before the people, and their blasphemous yells pierced her tender heart. Her mother's heart felt the sharp thorns, too, but she accepted this affliction with resignation, silently protesting against the insults of the crowd by acts of adoration and of love. We should behave in this way also. We should participate in the passion of Jesus by offering our own sufferings and we should make acts of love and of self-surrender in reparation for these acts of blasphemy.

2. When we see Jesus scourged and crowned with thorns, how can we complain if our path in life is also strewn with thorns? Jesus was the embodiment of innocence; He was God, yet He willed to suffer in order to expiate our sins and to teach us that the surest road to Heaven is the way of the Cross. It was because the Saints understood this so clearly that they were so eager to participate in the passion of Jesus Christ and to offer Him not only the inevitable sorrows of life, but also voluntary sufferings of their own as a proof of their love. Anyone who does not desire mortification and suffering does not desire Heaven, because he is not a true follower of Jesus crucified. *They who belong to Christ, says St. Paul, have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.*⁵ Let us meditate carefully on the significance of these stern words, so often forgotten today.

3. By the crowning with thorns Jesus wished to make special reparation for sins of thought, thoughts of impurity and of hatred, thoughts of ambition and of anger, and thoughts of despair. The evil thought is often the beginning of the greatest sins. It is essential to resist immediately and resolutely before the thought takes hold of us and arouses our evil instincts and desires. When we are tormented by bad thoughts let us look at Jesus crowned with thorns and ask Him for the grace to resist generously and successfully.

¹ Luke 23, 21.² Luke 23, 25.³ Cf. John 19, 4.⁴ Mark 15, 15-19.⁵ Gal. 5, 24.

I Ith October

THE FOURTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY

The Road to Calvary

I. Scourged, crowned with thorns, and derided, Jesus is finally condemned to death. Burdened with the Cross, He sets out for the place of execution in the midst of a crowd of enemies,

blasphemers, and idle spectators. Among them there is only a tiny group which sympathises with Jesus, namely, Mary His Mother, the devout women, and the beloved Apostle, St. John.

The divine Redeemer goes forward laboriously beneath the heavy weight of the Cross. He has already lost a large quantity of blood in Gethsemane and during the scourging and crowning with thorns. His strength seems to be failing, but love sustains Him. Looking feebly around Him, He sees the mocking Jews, the indifferent and disrespectful Roman soldiers, and a throng of curious spectators looking for something to amuse them. Is there nobody else? Where are those whom He cured miraculously, and those whom He comforted and forgave? Has nobody any pity for Him? Suddenly the crowd falls silent. A woman, pale and tearful, is approaching Him, supported by her friends. She defies the commands of the soldiers and the scowls of the executioners, and comes close to Him.

Here and there a murmur is heard: It must be his mother, poor woman! Jesus and Mary gaze at one another. It would be impossible for us to guess at the immense depths of love contained in that loving exchange of glances. Neither utters a word, for no words could express their anguish nor manifest their love. They look and understand one another, offering themselves as a holocaust for the redemption of wayward humanity.

Nevertheless, in this silent meeting there was great consolation for the Heart of Jesus, for He had found someone who loved and understood Him. Why do we not sympathise with Him, too, and love Him with all our heart?

2. The moment soon passes. The executioners urge Jesus forward once more towards the place of execution. His strength is exhausted and He stumbles several times beneath the weight of the Cross. Each time, however, He rises, covered with blood and dust, and again embraces the Cross.

How often we also fall! Sometimes, because of the weight of our cross, we fall in discouragement or in despair. On these

occasions let us look towards the divine Sufferer and embrace our cross again, for it is the ladder by which we must ascend to Heaven.

Sometimes it is sin which causes us to fall. If we have yielded to the violence of temptation, let us look towards Jesus just the same. He Who loved us so much on the way to Calvary and on the tree of the Cross is certainly ready to forgive and comfort us.

3. The executioners realised that Jesus had expended all His energy and became afraid that He would not be able to reach the place of execution. For this reason they compelled Simon of Cyrene, who was coming back from the country after his work, to carry the Cross instead of Jesus. At first he probably helped reluctantly, because he was tired and anxious to get home. When he recognised Jesus, however, he took the Cross willingly and carried it for Him.

What is our attitude to the cross which Jesus gives us? He Who was innocence itself carried His burden with perfect resignation and love. Why should not we who are so sinful carry ours with similar dispositions, since we need so much to expiate our sins and to show our love for Jesus?

12th October

THE FIFTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY

The Crucifixion

1. At last Jesus reaches Calvary, breathless and reduced to utter exhaustion. The instrument of torture is taken from Him and laid upon the ground. Our divine Redeemer suffers acute pain as He is again stripped of His garments, which have stuck to His wounds. Now he is stretched, an innocent victim, on the

altar of sacrifice, the Cross. One of the executioners grasps His hand, pierces it with a large nail, and attaches it to the wood. Then he does the same with the other hand and with the two feet. His Mother is close at hand. She feels in her heart the blows of the hammer which lacerate the living flesh of Jesus. Jesus remains silent, *as a meek lamb that is carried to be a victim.*¹

Now the executioners raise up the Cross and fix it in the hole already prepared for it. The shock of this impact sends a shudder of pain through the Victim's members and entire frame. Behold Him now, suspended between Heaven and earth, the mediator between God and humanity, the victim of expiation for the innumerable sins of men.

Come near to the Cross and kiss the bloodstained feet. While the Jews are insulting Him and most of the Apostles have abandoned Him, let us tell Him how we love Him. Let us tell Him of our sorrow for our sins and of our determination to make amends for our faults and for our ingratitude by living in accordance with His teaching and example.

2. Jesus had only one consolation in the midst of His terrible sufferings. His mother Mary was beside the Cross along with His beloved Apostle and the holy women who had always followed Him. Mary loved her Son with a love greater than that of any mother, which is the greatest love possible on earth. She loved Jesus with the heart of a Mother and of a Virgin; He was her only treasure. Moreover, she loved Him not only as her Son, but also as her God. Precisely because she loved Him as her God, her love was in perfect harmony with the divine will.

She understood the mystery which led Jesus to accept death on the Cross—the mystery of the Redemption. *He was offered because it was his own will.*² He was offered on our behalf as a voluntary victim to His Heavenly Father.

In the same way, Mary freely offered herself to God as a victim of expiation along with her Son. She saw on one hand

the child of her womb dying in frightful agony, and on the other sinful humanity in need of redemption from its iniquity. She did not hesitate; even as she pronounced her Fiat when the Angel told her that she was to be the instrument of the Incarnation, so now she repeated her acceptance of her part in the Redemption. By her first Fiat she became the Mother of God; by her second Fiat she became the loving Mother of poor sinners and our co-redemptrix in Jesus and for Jesus. *Woman, behold thy son,*³ the Redeemer said, referring to John and to the entire human race as represented by him.

3. Be our Mother, O Mary, for you have borne us spiritually on Mount Calvary at the foot of the Cross. Deign to obtain for us through your intercession that we may love Jesus as you loved Him and follow Him faithfully as you followed Him unto death.

¹ Jer. 11, 19.

² Is. 53, 7.

³ John 19, 27.

13th October

THE FIRST GLORIOUS MYSTERY

The Resurrection of Our Lord

1. Jesus could not have remained lifeless in the sepulchre. He was the Man-God, the conqueror of sin and of death. He willed to be subject to all the conditions of human existence with the exception of sin; therefore, He suffered and died for love of us.

However, as He had foretold, He rose gloriously from the tomb on the third day. This resurrection is proved historically in a most certain manner by the behaviour of the Apostles, who were at first downcast and incredulous, and were transformed into heroes and martyrs by the glorious apparitions of Jesus. It is confirmed by the obstinacy and deceitfulness of the Jews, who

went so far as to bribe the soldiers who were guarding the sepulchre not to reveal the truth. It is proved, moreover, by the fact that the Apostle Thomas refused to believe in the Resurrection until he had placed his finger in the wounds of the Redeemer, Who afterwards appeared to him.

We read in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles that the risen Jesus appeared many times to the Apostles to confirm their faith, to speak with them of the Kingdom of God, and to give them His final instructions and commands. We read also that He appeared to Mary Magdalen to reward her great love and to console her. Nowhere do we read that He appeared to His beloved Mother, Mary. However, the heart tells us what the Gospels omit to mention. Surely it is impossible to suppose that the risen Jesus would not have hastened to embrace and to console her who had borne Him in her chaste womb and had loved Him so much that she followed Him to the foot of the Cross?

The apparitions of Jesus narrated in the Gospel had a public purpose, being intended to confirm the faith of those who were fearful, discouraged, or incredulous. The apparitions to Mary were intimate and affectionate meetings with His dear Mother, who had never doubted for one moment that He would rise again. There may be another explanation, however. It is possible that Mary's humility would have prevented her from discussing with others her happy moments of reunion with her risen Son.

2. Do we wish to share also in the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ? Let us imitate Mary. First of all, we must participate as she did in the sufferings of Christ. By meditating frequently on the passion and death of Christ we can nourish in our hearts an intense love for Him Who suffered so much for our salvation. Let us learn to carry our cross, as He carried His, with resignation and with conformity to God's will. Spiritual joy is always the fruit of renunciation and of love.

We cannot be happy with Jesus triumphant if we have not

first imitated Jesus suffering. We cannot rise gloriously into Heaven if we have not first walked patiently with Mary along the way of Calvary.

3. The Resurrection of Christ demands a resurrection on our part also. If we are in sin, we must rise again. Or it may be that we must rise from a state of torpor to one of fervour, or from a life of worldly pleasure to an interior life nourished by grace, or from a life of selfishness to one of sacrifice.

In which state do we find ourselves? In the presence of the risen Christ and of His Blessed Mother happy in the contemplation of His glory, let us resolve to rise from sin and from spiritual tepidity in order to set out on the way of Christian perfection.

14th October

THE SECOND GLORIOUS MYSTERY

The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven

1. Forty days after His glorious resurrection Jesus came with all His friends, among them His Mother, to the Mount of Olives. This area had already witnessed the opening phase of His passion, which was all the more poignant, perhaps, because in Gethsemane it was not His body which was lacerated by scourges and nails, but His soul which experienced the agonising vision of the sins and ingratitude of the human race. Now, however, He is here with a glorified body as the conqueror of sin and of death. He looks for the last time on His small band of followers, to whom He has entrusted His mission of transforming the entire universe by preaching and putting into practice the Gospel message throughout the world. Now He promises them the Holy Spirit, Who will give them the power to overcome evil. Then He is

lifted up towards Heaven, until a bright cloud hides Him from their sight.

Perhaps the Blessed Mother was the last to take her eyes off the disappearing cloud which had removed Jesus from view. Her human eyes never saw again the beloved figure of her divine Son, but in her soul she saw Him entering triumphantly into Heaven among choirs of Angels and sitting at the right hand of the Eternal Father. She saw, and thought with infinite yearning of the not too distant day when she would have passed from mortal exile into the everlasting happiness of Heaven, where she would embrace her divine Son again in an ecstasy of love.

We have all been called to ascend to Heaven with Jesus and Mary. Let us remember, however, that only the innocent and the repentant can be admitted into Paradise. If we have been unfortunate enough to have lost our baptismal innocence, only the second way is left to us—the way of penance. We must purify ourselves of our sins by means of good works.

2. We must ascend higher and higher towards the summit of Christian perfection.

In the course of our ascent we must never stop and decide that we have gone far enough. To stop would inevitably mean going back. Jesus and Mary are inviting and encouraging us to go higher and higher.

Have we been purified of sin, the defiler of the soul and the destroyer of human dignity? Have we an intense horror even of venial sin, which separates us from God and kills the life of grace? It is still not enough; we must go higher.

Are we generous and unselfish in the fight to achieve holiness, guarding ourselves against the evil suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil? It is still not enough; we must continue to advance.

Do we carry the daily cross which God has entrusted to us and accept the burden with perfect resignation to His Holy Will? Very good, but even this is not enough.

3. O God, what more must we do for You? One thing only, He replies. We must belong altogether to Him, love only Him, and work only for Him. Then we shall have completed our ascent and shall be able to say with St. Paul: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.*² This is the final goal which we must strive whole-heartedly to attain.

¹ Cf. Acts 1, 6-9.

² Gal. 2, 20.

15th October

THE THIRD GLORIOUS MYSTERY

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

1. Before He left this earth for the glory of Heaven, Jesus promised His Apostles that He would not leave them orphans, but would send them the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, *whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.*¹ This promise was repeated by our divine Redeemer on the day of His ascension, when He told them not to depart from Jerusalem until the promise would have been fulfilled. In fact, the Apostles were obedient to His instructions. They gathered together in the Cenacle, where they spent the time in constant prayer along with Mary and a number of the faithful. On the feast of Pentecost the house was shaken by a sound from Heaven as of a violent wind blowing, and tongues of fire appeared which settled on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.²

According to a pious tradition the Holy Spirit descended first on the Blessed Virgin in the form of a ball of flame, from which emerged the tongues of fire which alighted on the heads of all present. There is a good deal of significance in this tradition. As Mary took first place in sharing in the passion of Jesus, so she ought to be first to share in the glory of the Redemption. St. Bernard compares the Blessed Virgin to an aquaduct bearing the

treasures of grace and the gifts of the Holy Ghost to all the faithful.³ It is an apt comparison, for the Mother of the Redeemer occupies a position of supremacy in the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Like the Apostles, we should persevere in prayer with Mary.⁴ We should ask for the light and gifts of the Holy Spirit, for we need them very much if we are to walk always in the way of truth and goodness.

2. The Apostles were completely transformed after the feast of Pentecost. They had been ignorant rustics, timid and vacillating. They had hardly understood at all the lofty teaching of Christ, for they were hoping for an earthly kingdom in which they would occupy the highest posts.

When they received the Holy Spirit, however, their minds were flooded with supernatural light and they became heroic in their resolution. Ignorant though they had been, they became masters of truth far superior to the sages of Athens or the philosophers of Rome. They were no longer timid and hesitating, but fearlessly encountered the power of the Sanhedrin, the whips of the soldiery, the dangers of long voyages, and martyrdom itself.

We also have received the illumination and favours of the Holy Spirit. Many times when we have invoked Him, He has inspired and consoled us. But we may not have responded with the same fervour and self-denial as the Apostles. Let us remember that to neglect God's gifts is to risk our eternal salvation.

3. Because of our weakness we should seek the intercession of Mary and, like the Apostles, persevere in prayer with her. Our prayers, however, should be more supernatural.

There is nothing to prevent us asking our good Mother to look after our temporal needs, such as our health, our business, and our attachments. The first miracle which Mary wrung from the heart of Jesus was at the wedding feast of Cana. Nevertheless, we should not be too materialistic. We should seek first of all from the Holy Spirit through Mary's intercession the greater

glory of God and the eternal salvation of ourselves and of all our brothers in Jesus Christ.

¹ John 14, 16-18.

² Cf. Acts 1; 2.

³ Serm. de Aquaeductu.

⁴ Cf. Acts 1, 14.

16th October

THE FOURTH GLORIOUS MYSTERY

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven

1. The Fourth Book of Kings tells us that the prophet Elias was brought up into Heaven in a fiery chariot without having first endured the pains and humiliation of death.¹ Why did God not do likewise in the case of the Blessed Virgin, commanding His Angels to bear her to Heaven before death struck her innocent body? As St. Paul says, it was sin which caused death to enter the world. From the moment of her conception Mary was free from the slightest taint of sin, for she was immaculate and full of grace. Nevertheless, according to the most widely held tradition, Mary chose to die even as her divine Son had willed to die. Jesus *was offered because it was his own will.*² The same is true in Mary's case, with only this difference. Jesus died a cruel death after the most hideous tortures in the midst of a blaspheming and hate-ridden mob. Nothing like this happened to Mary, although she is called the Queen of Martyrs because of the sword which pierced her soul at the sight of her divine Son dying in such agony.

Jesus willed, however, that the immaculate body of His Mother would remain intact. It was only her great love and intense desire of being reunited with her Son which gradually consumed her mortal life. Her ever-increasing love for God broke the bonds of her mortal frame until she went to sleep at last in the Lord.

If only our death could be the same!

2. Because we are wretched sinners, death for us is a punish-

ment. Let us accept it with resignation. We should frequently offer to God whatever death He has in store for us, with all its sorrow and suffering.

We can gain great merit in this way. As a result of our daily offering, God will surely grant us a more peaceful death. There are many people who long for death. Some desire it in moments of discouragement as a release from the sorrows of life. Others long for it to bring to an end their struggle against their sinful inclinations and to assure them of an everlasting reward, to gain which they may not even have made many sacrifices. The first kind of desire is unworthy of a true soldier of Christ while the second is presumptuous and self-interested. The only legitimate yearning for death is the desire to be united at last with Jesus.

This was the nature of Mary's desire, as well as that of St. Paul, who wrote that he desired *to depart and to be with Christ*.³

3. As a result of this meditation, let us make the following resolutions in the presence of Mary assumed into Heaven.

(1) To offer to God every day in expiation of our sins whatever kind of death He will please to give us.

(2) To build up for ourselves henceforth a substantial credit account of good actions and generous sacrifices.

(3) To pray fervently to our Mother Mary to obtain for us from her divine Son a death which will be peaceful like hers, with all our sins forgiven and our hearts filled with a loving desire to be with God.

¹ Cf. 4 Kings 2, 11.

² Is. 53, 7.

³ Phil. 1, 23.

17th October

THE FIFTH GLORIOUS MYSTERY

The Crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth

1. When the Virgin Mary was borne into Heaven, soul and body, by the Angels, she was received with great rejoicing by

the entire company of the blessed. A halo of light surrounded her as her Divine Son, Jesus Christ, placed her on His right hand and proclaimed her Queen of Heaven and Earth. It was fitting that this supreme dignity should have been accorded her, for she was the beloved daughter of the Eternal Father, the immaculate spouse of the Holy Spirit, and the mother of God, the Word made man and the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Mary is Queen of the Angels because, even though she is inferior to them by reason of her human nature, she is superior to them by reason of her dignity as Mother of God. What Angel could say to the Incarnate Word: "You are my son"? What Angel could command Him as she could in her role of Mother?

Mary has yet another claim to her title which no Angel could ever have. She participated in the passion of her Son Jesus, offering herself along with Him as a victim of expiation. She made a contribution in the supernatural order of the Redemption which neither Angel nor Saint could have made. With Jesus, through Jesus, and in Jesus, she is the co-redemptrix of the human race. Let us bow low before such greatness and join with the choirs of the blessed in paying homage to her.

2. Mary is also styled Queen of the Patriarchs because it was through her that they came to possess the object of their desires, the divine Redeemer, Who released them from Limbo and brought them to Heaven. She is Queen of the Prophets because their prophecies were realised through her. She is Queen of the Apostles whom she assisted and encouraged after the departure of her divine Son. She is the Queen of Martyrs because her maternal heart was pierced by a sword of sorrow. She is Queen of the Confessors because nobody else was capable of so deep and lively a profession of the faith. She is the Queen of Virgins because her virginal purity was crowned by the supreme dignity of Mother of God. She is Queen, moreover, of all the Saints,

for no other human creature could ever surpass, or even dream of the summit of holiness to which she attained. Above all, however, she is our Mother and our most powerful Queen. She loves us because we have been redeemed by the blood of her Son, Jesus Christ, and she desires to obtain God's favours for us and to take us under her maternal protection.

We children of Eve, in exile in this vale of tears, should turn to Mary with confidence and trust in her power to save us.

3. Mary's reign extends even to the powers of hell, which were vanquished through her instrumentality as Mother of God. We should not lose courage when the devil tries to trap us into sinning. Instead, we should ask Mary, humbly and perseveringly, to save us. Besides praying to her, however, let us take care to imitate her virtues. We must endeavour to become more like Mary if we wish her to regard us as her children and to take us under her maternal protection.

18th October

THE "OUR FATHER"

1. Our Lord exhorted His disciples on many occasions to pray often and with confidence if they wished to be heard. Everything which they asked His heavenly Father in His name, He said, they would obtain. Ask, He said, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you. Finally, He insisted that we ought to pray and never to give up. In other words, life can be a continuous prayer if we offer to God all our thoughts, words, and actions.

The ideal Christian prayer is to do the will of God at all times from the motive of pure love. The Apostles, however, who had not made that much progress in the spiritual life, asked

Jesus to teach them how to pray.¹ It was then that Our Lord composed the most beautiful of prayers, the "Our Father."² When we recite it, we speak to God in the words of Jesus Christ Himself and unite our weak voices with the powerful voice of the Son of God. We address the Eternal God, moreover, by the name of Father. Even in the Old Testament God is often referred to in this way. Then, however, He figured as the Father of the chosen people, whereas now He is the Father of all. He is our Father, the Father of all mankind and of all races, whom He has willed to redeem from the slavery of sin. The term "Our Father" has taken on a new and fuller meaning. Our weak prayer becomes united to that of Jesus, our first-born brother, and to the prayers of the Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, and Confessors, who form and have formed throughout the centuries the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. We need no longer feel that we are on our own, for through the Communion of Saints our entreaties are joined to those of the entire Church, militant, suffering, and triumphant. We can be confident, therefore, that our prayer will be heard.

2. "*Our Father, Who art in Heaven.*" Heaven is God Himself, Who reveals Himself to the souls of the blessed. If a man lives in God, his mind and heart are already in Heaven, even though he is still an exile upon this earth. It is a wonderful experience to lead a bodily existence upon earth while our minds are with God in Heaven, for, as St. Paul says, *our citizenship is in heaven.*³ As we are aware, God is everywhere, in Heaven and on earth. When we invoke our Father Who is in Heaven, however, we manifest our faith in Him and in His generosity, whereby He reveals Himself in all His glory to the blessed and shows His mercy to us poor exiles when we come to Him. In the first words of the Pater Noster, we express not only our faith, but also our hope of being happy with God for all eternity.

3. God is truly our Father because He created us from nothing and because He caused us to be born again through the

Incarnation of His only-begotten Son and the work of the Redemption. In this way He is doubly our Father.

Can we claim, however, to be true sons of God? It is not enough simply to make this claim by reciting the "Our Father," but we should prove it in a practical way in our daily lives. We can do this by accepting God's will in all things, by obeying His commandments and the precepts of the Church, and especially by loving Him more than anything in creation.

¹ Luke 11, 1.

² Mt. 6, 9-13.

³ Phil. 3, 20.

19th October

THE FIRST PART OF THE "OUR FATHER"

I. The Pater Noster, being God's own composition, is the most perfect of prayers. It covers, moreover, all our obligations and all our needs. It may be divided into two parts, the first of which refers to God, the second to ourselves. We should ask first of all for whatever is important to God, and then for whatever concerns ourselves. This is the command of Jesus. *Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides.*¹

When we have invoked our Father in Heaven we go on to pray: "Hallowed be Thy name."

Let us think about this. What do we look for first of all when we pray? Is it the glory of God, or is it our own self-interest? Which occupies the principal place in our thoughts, God or our own ego? Let us remember that we have been created for the glory of God. We shall not find happiness unless we seek God's glory alone, for God is our true welfare.

We must not allow ourselves to become absorbed in insignificant worldly objects, which can never completely satisfy us.

Rather must we keep our minds on God. "God alone is sufficient," said St. Teresa. Without Him there is nothing good within us or around us.

When we say "Hallowed be Thy name," moreover, we should not only give God's glory precedence over all our desires, but we should also make an act of reparation for the countless blasphemies by which His name has been injured. How can we remain passive and inert while our Creator and our Redeemer is being continually blasphemed and offended? At the very least we can set against the diabolical insults of many of our fellow-men our own humble and loving prayer: "May Thy name, my God, be blessed and glorified."

2. Our second ejaculation is: "Thy kingdom come." It is true that God reigns over Heaven, earth, and the infernal regions. Everything is subject to His will; the sun, the stars, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the tiniest insects carry out His commands. Even the demons of Hell, whom He has condemned to eternal punishment, are obedient to His will. But what about the human race?

Man possesses the precious but dangerous privilege of free will, which he has power to abuse by rebelling against God. We should pray that the sovereignty of God may be triumphant in all hearts, beginning with our own, and that all men may willingly subject themselves to His commandments and to His grace. This is the only way in which they can find peace. *Take my yoke upon you . . . and you will find rest for your souls.*²

We should pray, moreover, for the Church, which is the kingdom of God on earth. We should pray for her peaceful victory over her enemies, who persecute her and impede her work for the salvation of souls. We should love the Church even as we love Jesus Christ, for the Church is His handiwork and the fruit of His Precious Blood.

3. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." There is infinite and everlasting happiness in Heaven because all the

blessed do God's will in a spirit of love and find perfect peace in Him.

We have a strict obligation to do God's will, because we all owe prompt and generous obedience to our Creator and Redeemer. Furthermore, this is the only way in which we can acquire peace of soul, which is the beginning of true happiness. *There is no peace to the wicked.*³ The sinner can never be at peace. Therefore, when we say "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven," let us resolve to do God's will in all things in the manner of the blessed in Heaven. Our reward will be spiritual peace, even in the midst of trial and sorrow.

¹ Mt. 6, 33.

² Mt. 11, 29.

³ Is. 48, 22.

20th October

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"

1. In the second part of the Lord's Prayer we ask the universal Father, on behalf of ourselves and of our brethren, for all things necessary for soul and body. Since we have already paid homage to God, our Creator and our Redeemer, and have prayed for the triumph of His kingdom and for the accomplishment of His will in Heaven and on earth, Our Lord does not forbid us to think now of ourselves and to pray for our own needs. "Give us this day our daily bread," we ask, intending to pray both for our spiritual and material requirements.

We should not delude ourselves into imagining that it is we who produce the fruits of the earth. A grain of wheat dies beneath the soil, but God has infused into it a mysterious force as a result of which, in dying, it generates new life.

The moisture of the soil, the warmth of the air, and the light of the sun combine to develop this mysterious life-force, which produces the green stalk and then the flaxen ear of corn which

provides us with bread. It is God Who has given this vital power to this tiny seed, as well as to all the other seeds of the soil. It is He Who has endowed the soil with the nutritive elements from which the seeds draw life, and it is He Who sends the dew, the rain, and the sunshine, which cause the flowers to blossom and the plants to bear fruit.

We should ask God humbly, therefore, to "give us this day our daily bread." Our own labours would be futile without the intervention of the all-powerful Creator. We are capable neither of producing nor of destroying a single atom nor a single seedling. Without God we are incapable of achieving anything either in the natural or in the supernatural order. Therefore we must ask Him to provide us with what we need. He is supremely good and loves us very much. His Providence will not leave us in want, even if we are often obliged to work hard in co-operation with Him to procure the necessaries of life. The birds have no granary, yet they manage to find enough seed to keep them alive because God is watching over them. How could we suppose that He will not look after us if we turn to Him with trust and perseverance?

2. Note that each one of us prays for "our daily bread," not for "my daily bread." We should not ask only for our own requirements, but for those of all our fellow-men as well.

There are many poverty-stricken people for whom bread is very scarce. We should pray especially for them and should be prepared to share our bread with those who have none. Both charity and justice demand this of us. Let us ask, moreover, only for our necessary requirements, not for wealth and luxury. Anything superfluous which we possess does not belong to us, but to the poor. *Give that which remains*, the Gospel commands, *as alms*.¹ Let us remember that, whether we are rich or poor, we are all one great family. Our love for one another should not be merely theoretical, but practical; otherwise we are not sincere Christians.

3. We should not ask only for food for the body, but also for spiritual nourishment. *Not by bread alone does man live*, says Holy Scripture, *but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*² The soul must be nourished as well as the body, for it has its own life which is worn away by the daily conflict against sinful inclinations and by the constant struggle to achieve sanctity. It needs to be nourished by the word of God, by His grace, and especially by receiving the Author of grace frequently in Holy Communion. We should ask before anything else for the grace of God and for the true bread of life which descends from Heaven. *Whoever eats this bread will live for ever.* Let us ask for this life-giving bread for ourselves and for our unfortunate brothers who are living apart from Jesus in a state of spiritual death. May daily Communion become once more the inexhaustible source of the spiritual life and of Christian virtue which it was in the early days of the Church.

¹ Luke 11, 41.

² Mt. 4, 4; cf. Deut. 8, 3.

21st October

OUR DAILY BREAD

1. In the Pater Noster Jesus instructs us to ask for our daily bread—that is, for sufficient bread for today, not for tomorrow. In this way He warns us not to be too preoccupied with the future, but to trust in Providence and accept from God's hands from day to day whatever is necessary for us. God is our Father and loves us as His children. Knowing this, why should we worry about the future?

We are in the hands of God, Who looks after all His children. Let us entrust ourselves completely to His care. This does not mean that we should indulge in any kind of fatalism, expecting everything from God and doing nothing for ourselves. We

cannot and should not expect unnecessary miracles. We are under an obligation to work, because work is the result of, and the punishment for, sin. It enables us to co-operate with God in His work of creation and has been ennobled and sanctified by Jesus Christ, Who chose to be *the carpenter's son*,¹ and a carpenter Himself.² We should work, therefore, but should not worry.

When we have done everything of which we are capable, we should leave the rest to Divine Providence.

We should not desire, moreover, to accumulate riches which, as the Gospel warns us, often turn out to be thorns which choke us³ and halt our progress towards God. We should desire instead the true spiritual riches, namely, divine grace and virtue. We should be prepared to expend all our energy in order to acquire these. If material wealth comes our way, however, it is not necessary to reject it. Evangelical poverty is not a command, but simply a counsel of perfection. As long as we use it well and do not become too attached to it, wealth can be an instrument of virtue and a powerful means of doing good.⁴

2. We can find this teaching which is contained in these words of the "Our Father" in another section of the Gospel, where Jesus tells us not to ask for riches and not to hoard goods for the future, but to pray and work from day to day for our daily needs. *Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on . . . Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them . . . Consider how the lilies of the fields 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. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which flourishes today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you . . . you of little faith! . . . Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*⁵

3. When we pray to God to give us our daily bread, we should remember this beautiful sermon of Christ, which will remove

all our anxiety and worldly worry. As long as we are prepared to do our work, we shall obtain our daily bread from our loving Father and shall receive in addition spiritual peace, confidence, and perfect resignation to His holy will.

¹ Mt. 13, 55.

² Cf. Mk. 6, 3.

³ Cf. Luke 8, 14.

⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, *Contra G.*, III, 134.

⁵ Cf. Mt. 6, 25-34.

22nd October

“FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS”

I. When we have asked God for nourishment for soul and body, we go on to implore forgiveness for our debts, whether they have been contracted in the course of nature, or of grace, or of sin. We owe everything to God. There was a time when we did not exist, and in His divine omnipotence He created us from nothing. Our bodily powers and spiritual faculties are His gifts to us. If we enjoy health, it is He Who has given it to us. If we have any ability, it comes from Him. Anything which we have been able to achieve as the result of mental or manual labour has been made possible by His help.

Who is it but God Who rescues us from the many perils which surround us? Who but He enables us to overcome so many difficulties? How many times we should have died if He had not sustained us!

Let us think back over our past lives. How much reason we have to be grateful to God, Who has watched over us continually like a loving Father. The conservation of life is a continuous act of creation. When we recite the Pater Noster, therefore, we should express our filial gratitude to God and ask for His continued protection. Every moment of life is a new gift of God and an act of His infinite love in our regard. Let us be grateful and love Him generously in return.

2. Over and above these natural debts, we are also indebted to God for His grace. Not only has God created us, but He has also raised us to the supernatural order. By His grace He has made us His friends and His adopted children. As a result of original sin we lost this supernatural life and were unable to regain it by our own efforts.

God was moved with compassion for us, however, and sent His own divine Son to sacrifice Himself for love of us in order to redeem us and to restore to us the supernatural life of the soul. We are greatly indebted in the supernatural order, therefore, to our Creator and our Redeemer. The only way in which we can adequately satisfy our obligation is by offering up the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

We have been born, moreover, in the Catholic Church and have received a Christian education. God has always been close to us with His Sacraments. By means of Baptism He caused us to be born again to a life of grace. Whenever we fell, He raised us up again through the Sacrament of Penance, and when we were weak and faltering He nourished us with His Eucharistic food. Let us adore Him and acknowledge that we can never thank Him enough for all that He has done for us. That is why we need to repeat time and time again: Forgive us our debts.

3. Finally, we owe God a great deal on account of our sins. Unfortunately, our only return for God's continual favours has been negligence, ingratitude, and sin. How many failings we have been guilty of throughout our lives. Since it is an offence against God, Who is infinitely good and amiable, even venial sin cannot properly be atoned for by the merits of all the Angels and of all the Saints of Heaven. Therefore it was necessary for the Son of God made man to offer Himself as a victim of expiation on our behalf.

Remembering His infinite merits, we should humbly ask God: Forgive us our debts, that is, our many sins and failings and whatever punishment is owing to us, for every sin demands

some expiation either in this life or in the next. Meanwhile, we should accept with resignation all the sufferings which God sends us in reparation for our sins, and we should promise never to offend Him any more.

23rd October

“AS WE ALSO FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS”

I. When we ask God to forgive us, we promise to forgive those who have offended us. Unless we are to be guilty of deception, therefore, we must pardon them. If we refuse to forgive, God will not forgive us, Jesus tells us in the Gospel to pardon offences not seven times, but seventy times seven.¹ In other words, we must always be prepared to forgive. He tells us to return good for evil and to turn the other cheek when someone strikes us.

Not alone did Jesus command us to do this, but He also set us an example. While He was suffering fearful torments on the Cross and was surrounded by jeering enemies, He turned to His heavenly Father and uttered those sublime words: *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*²

How could we gaze at the Crucifix and dare to refuse forgiveness to anyone? No matter how grave may seem the injuries done to us by our neighbour, let us remember that they are insignificant in comparison with the insults which we have dared to offer to the infinite majesty of our Creator. They are as the hundred denarii compared with the ten thousand talents of Christ's parable.³

If we wish to receive God's pardon, therefore, let us be prepared to forgive. Let our forgiveness be sincere, however, and not a mere formal token. The forgiveness freely granted by

a heart scourged by the injuries of others is a pleasing sacrifice offered to God.

2. *If thou art offering thy gift at the altar*, Jesus tells us, *and thou rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*⁴ Prayer is futile, therefore, unless we have first forgiven our enemies.

Learn from me, Jesus said when He proposed Himself as a model to be imitated, *for I am meek and humble of heart*. Then, He added, *you will find rest for your souls.*⁵ How true this is. The foundation of our hatred, anger, and resentment is always our wounded pride. We need Christlike gentleness and humility if we are to forgive sincerely and generously. Only when we have this gentleness and humility, moreover, shall we find joy in forgiving, and only then shall we have peace. As long as there is room in our hearts for pride and hatred, we can never enjoy peace of soul.

3. Some people hold that it is base and low-spirited to forgive easily, whereas a keen sense of honour demands revenge. Nothing could be more false. Even animals can seek revenge. The true greatness of human nature lies in its ability to conquer its lower instincts. "It is far more difficult," wrote a famous historian of antiquity, "to overcome oneself than to defeat one's enemy in battle."⁶ Forgiveness requires a victory over pride and sensitivity and is therefore a high act of human value.

When we forgive, we do not abase ourselves before the man who has offended us, but we raise ourselves above him by our nobility and generosity. By behaving in this manner we display our self-control, inspire sentiments of respect and benevolence, and may even bring about a reconciliation and a renewal of friendship.

So let us make a few good resolutions. (1) Remembering how Jesus prayed for His executioners, let us always be generous in pardoning others. (2) Let us do good to those who have offended

us, adopting the motto of St. Paul: *Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*⁷ (3) When the injury which we have received disturbs us greatly and causes us to lose our peace of mind, let us remain silent and procrastinate. "Delay is the best cure for anger," wrote Seneca, who also very truly observed that whenever we have been angry with others we end by being angry with ourselves.

¹ Cf. Mt. 18, 22.² Luke 23, 24.³ Mt. 18, 24-28.⁴ Mt. 5, 23-24.⁵ Cf. Mt. 11, 29.⁶ Val. Max., L, 4.⁷ Rom. 12, 21.

24th October

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

I. *Let no man say when he is tempted, St. James warns us, that he is tempted by God; 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.*¹

When we ask God during the Pater Noster not to lead us into temptation, we should really beseech Him to rescue us from temptation. We should not request this in any absolute sense, however, for it would be a poor soldier who would refuse to be tried in battle. Our prayer should be prompted by a holy fear of offending God. We should ask Him, therefore, either to set us free from temptations or to grant us the grace to overcome them. We should then co-operate earnestly with divine grace in resisting these temptations and should adopt the means necessary to overcome them.

In the first place, we should never go voluntarily into an occasion of sin. What use is it asking God to rescue us from temptations if we immediately proceed to go in search of them? When possible, therefore, avoid the occasions of sin. *He who*

*loves danger, says the Holy Spirit, will perish in it.*² If duty or charity compels us to expose ourselves to danger, God will certainly help us. But if we fail to recognise our own frailty and expose ourselves voluntarily to the risk of committing sin, God is not obliged to work a miracle to save us. Our presumption and imprudence will be severely punished.

2. Life is a prolonged trial. St. Paul compares it to a stadium in which everyone must fight to win. If anyone lays down his arms, he will be unable to conquer his passions or to achieve the palm of victory. *One who enters a contest is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules.*³

With the exception of the Blessed Virgin, every human being is obliged to battle against the temptations of the flesh. Sometimes these can be quite terrifying. St. Paul himself confessed that he felt another law in his members warring against the law of his mind. *Unhappy man that I am!* he exclaimed in supplication to God to come to his assistance. *Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*⁴

The false enchantment and wickedness of the world also threatens to ensnare us. *We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.*⁵ It is easy to become absorbed in worldly affairs and to forget the all-important spiritual realities.

Finally, there is the devil, whom St. Peter describes as wandering about *seeking someone to devour*. *Resist him*, he urges us, *steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same suffering befalls your brethren all over the world.*⁶

Faced as we are with these three foes, we should implore God to help us by His grace. Lead us not into temptation, O God, but help us to conquer these enemies. Without You we can do nothing, but with Your aid anything is possible. Lead us not into temptation.

3. Why, we may ask, does God permit us to be tempted? It is for our own good, because (1) He desires us to co-operate

with Him in our own salvation. The crown of glory which is to be our reward will only be given to him who has earned it. *Blessed is the man who endures temptation, says St. James, for when he has been tried, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.*⁷ (2) He wishes us to understand, moreover, that we can do nothing without Him, so that we may be humble and may pray to Him with faith and perseverance. (3) He desires that we may be vigilant and may live in union with Him by means of prayer. He wishes us to realise that only with His help can we aspire to the supernatural life and triumph over our enemies. Apart from Him we shall be lost, but close to Him we shall be invincible.

¹ James 1, 13-15.² Eccus. 3, 25.³ 2 Tim. 2, 5.⁴ Rom. 7, 24.⁵ 1 John 5, 19.⁶ Cf. 1 Peter 5, 9.⁷ James 1, 12.

25th October

“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”

1. “Deliver us from evil. Amen.” This is our last request in the Lord’s Prayer. God is our Father, Creator, and Redeemer, Who cannot desire our ruin, but only our welfare. Nevertheless, He wishes us to ask Him every day to deliver us from evil.

We ask God to deliver us from evil of every kind. There is nothing to prevent us from beseeching Him to save us from physical ills, such as sickness or hardship or any of the other many afflictions of life. God loves us and therefore does not wish us to have to suffer. He loves us, however, as He knows best, and so He desires our true welfare. He knows that suffering and sorrow are our necessary heritage in life. They are the salt which preserves us from corruption.

It would be fatal for us to be always happy in this world, for then we should forget God and our true and everlasting happi-

ness. By all means let us ask humbly for deliverance from bodily ills, but let us not complain if God does not grant our request. He alone knows what is best for us now and in the future.

Finally, when we ask God to rescue us from material evils, we should do so in a spirit of submission and resignation to His holy will. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." We should keep in mind the words of Jesus Christ. *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*¹ Where are we to follow Him? To Calvary, of course. We must suffer and die as He did. Only afterwards can we achieve everlasting happiness.

Deliver us from evil, therefore, O God. Deliver us if possible from bodily and from earthly ills, but let Your will be done. We realise that there is a purpose in suffering, the mission of which is to purify us and to lead us more easily to You. We shall thank You if You hear our plea, but we shall be no less grateful if it pleases You to reject it.

2. When we ask God to deliver us from evil, we should think chiefly of the real evil, which is spiritual. All other evils are insignificant in comparison with sin, which is an offence committed against God, our only good. Sin robs us of His grace, which is the supernatural life of the soul, deprives us of His friendship, and is an act of ingratitude towards our supreme Benefactor.

When we pray to God to deliver us from evil, we should renew our determination to avoid sin by every means in our power. Prayer is futile unless it is accompanied by the resolution never to offend God again. Our prayers and good resolutions will draw God's favour and will strengthen our bond of intimacy with Him.

3. Deliver us, O God, from the evil of eternal damnation. Sin is the greatest evil, but as long as we are on earth it is an evil which can still be remedied, for God in His infinite mercy is always ready to forgive us and to restore us to His divine

friendship if we sincerely repent. In Hell, however, there is no further remedy, for there the mercy of God has been superseded by His infinite justice. Where the tree falls, there it must lie for ever. Such dreadful unhappiness is barely conceivable.

Deliver us from sin, O God; deliver us from a bad death; deliver us from Hell. Help us to love You more and more and to serve You more faithfully so that we may one day enjoy Your blessed company for all eternity. Amen.

¹ Luke 9, 23.

26th October

THE HAIL MARY

I. After the Lord's Prayer there is no more beautiful prayer than the Hail Mary, which we should recite with particular devotion in the decades of the Holy Rosary. At the beginning of the Rosary we can imagine that we are witnesses of the Annunciation to Mary in her home at Nazareth. An Angel descends from Heaven and bows before the Blessed Virgin as she kneels absorbed in prayer. *Hail, full of grace*, he says, *the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.*¹ We should join with the Angel of God in repeating these words reverently and devoutly.

The constant repetition of this prayer is very pleasing to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother. When we greet her with the words of the Angel, we remind her of the great mystery of the Incarnation, which was the beginning of her lofty mission as co-redemptrix and the dawn of Christian civilisation.

Even when we say these words over and over again, they can never become monotonous. When a son is speaking to his mother, every word possesses an unlimited warmth and meaning because it is the expression of a boundless love. When we recite the decades of the Rosary, we should think of the heavenly Mother who is watching over us and listening to us, eager to

console and assist us. She loves us with a maternal love, but she requires us to love her also and to prove that we are her children by imitating her virtues.

2. The Angel's greeting was later completed by the salvation of St. Elizabeth. As soon as Elizabeth saw the Blessed Virgin coming to visit her, she cried out in humble veneration: *Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!*²

In the first part of the Hail Mary, then, we pay her in the words of the Gospel the highest tributes ever accorded to any human creature, proclaiming her to be full of grace, blessed among women, and Mother of the Redeemer. The second part, which was later added by the Church, is a heartfelt supplication addressed to Mary as the Mother of God and our Mother. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." It would be hard to find a more touching plea. We ask our heavenly Mother to intercede for us now because we have such great need of her assistance in this vale of tears and temptations. May she be always by our side to shelter us beneath her mantle.

3. We seek her intercession, moreover, at the hour of death. Death must come, but if we have prayed often to our heavenly Mother she will certainly be with us in those final and decisive moments of our lives. If Mary is there to help us, we may be sure that death will come as a consolation, for it will be a peaceful journey towards everlasting happiness.

¹ Luke 1, 26-28.

² Luke 1, 42.

27th October

OUTWARD APPEARANCES

1. Men of the world look at the outward appearances of things and are often satisfied with that. Many of them desire and long for physical beauty, wealth, high social status and honours. It

does not matter to them if beneath this splendid facade there are concealed a mean and impoverished spirit, a corrupt and dishonest heart, an egoism indifferent to noble ideals, and an astuteness intent on ousting potential rivals. All this is unimportant as long as they are successful and can keep up appearances.

We tend to live for what others think and say about us, in other words, for external appearances.

2. St. Augustine contemplated the haughtiness and ostentatiousness of so-called great men who assumed the airs of demi-gods. "Take away the arrogance," he commented, "and what are men but men?" How true this is.

*Man seeth those things that appear, says the Holy Spirit, but the Lord beholdeth the heart.*¹

God is interested in the soul, not in surface appearances. The philosophy of the world is much different from the teaching of the Gospel. *Unless you turn and become like little children, Jesus tells us, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*² *Learn from me, He says elsewhere, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.*³

To which side do we belong? Are we concerned about external appearances, high position, praise, and worldly honours? Do these things make up our purpose in life? If so, we are not sincere Christians.

We must ask with St. Paul whether it is right for us to seek to please men or God. If we are striving after outward appearances, looking for praise and worldly honour, we have not advanced in the way of perfection. It is necessary to seek the glory of God in all things if we desire to be holy.

3. The false virtuousness of the Pharisees consisted in an outward show which concealed a spiritual vacuum and eventually led to interior corruption and hypocrisy. Jesus was merciful, humble, and gentle towards everybody, even towards sinners such as the adulteress, Mary Magdalen, and the good thief. He

was relentless and stern only when confronted by a certain type of wickedness—hypocrisy. He called the Pharisees a brood of vipers, and likened hypocrites to *whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.*⁴ How dreadful if we were to belong to such a category, for we should be already judged and condemned. The fundamental law of the Gospel is sincerity; we must have charity and purity of intention.

Hypocrisy and duplicity have no place in Christianity. Let us examine ourselves strictly and if we discover anything false or distorted in our personality let us resolve to correct it.

¹ 1 Kings 16, 7.

² Mt. 18, 3.

³ Mt. 11, 29.

⁴ Mt. 23, 27.

28th October

DIVINE WORSHIP, CHARITY, AND JUSTICE

I. *Divine Worship.* We have a strict duty to honour and obey God. "I, the Lord, am your God," He tells us in the first commandment of the Decalogue. "You shall not have other gods besides me." We are obliged, therefore, to worship God both internally and externally, since both soul and body are created by God. Internal worship is especially necessary, for without it external worship would be an empty formality. It is useless to kneel before the altar, to assist at sacred rites, and to recite vocal prayers, if all the time our minds are elsewhere and we are lacking in the love of God. Spiritual adoration and prayer are more important than the bowed head and the bended knee.

It would be a grave error, however, to imagine that internal adoration is sufficient and that there is no need to assemble in the church, to observe feast days, or to participate in sacred rites

and receive the Sacraments as the Church commands. Everything should be subject to God. The Church was founded by Christ and endowed by Him with the authority to lay down the exact manner in which we should pay homage to Almighty God. She has the right to dictate the feasts and ceremonies in which we are obliged to participate. Anyone who refuses to obey the Church is guilty of disobedience to God. *He who hears you, hears me*, said Jesus Christ to His Apostles and through them to their successors, *and he who rejects you, rejects me*.¹

How do we adore God? Are we among those who pray with their lips and not from the heart? Or do we believe that private devotion is quite sufficient and that there is no need to subject ourselves to all the laws of the Church? In either case we should have gone astray and should be unable to gain God's favour.

2. *Charity.* *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him*.² Charity is the fundamental rule of the Gospel; if a man has no charity, he is not a Christian. Charity is two-fold, consisting in the love of God and the love of our neighbour. One cannot exist without the other. Jesus calls this His own commandment, on which His entire law depends.

Charity is the leaven of Christianity which sanctifies everything. Consequently, divine worship without charity is both absurd and offensive to God.

If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, Jesus tells us, and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.³ Worship is valueless without charity, which must take precedence. If we do not love God and our neighbour, it is useless to perform outward acts of adoration.

3. *Justice.* Charity without justice has no proper foundation and cannot be genuine. Charity is the perfection and the complement of justice. *Love, as St. Paul says, is the fulfilment of the Law*.⁴

It is impossible to love God and our neighbour sincerely unless

we are first prepared to give to everyone whatever rightly belongs to him.

God prefers justice and charity to external worship. *Woe to you Pharisees!* said Jesus Christ, *because you pay tithes on mint and rue and every herb, and disregard justice and the love of God.*⁵ It is obvious from this that if we wish to observe the divine law we must first of all be just and charitable. Justice is particularly necessary, for it is absurd to claim that we love our neighbour as ourselves if we are unwilling to give to our fellow-men whatever is his by right. Therefore they are not sincere Christians who make a show of being charitable and giving alms but fail to meet all the demands of justice, including those of social justice. Let us examine ourselves carefully and, if we find that we are guilty of any kind of injustice, let us make up for it as soon as possible.

¹ Luke 10, 16.

² 1 John 4, 16.

³ Mt. 5, 23-24.

⁴ Rom. 13, 10.

⁵ Luke 11, 42.

29th October

HUMAN PRAISE AND CENSURE

1. It is pleasant to be praised. If we are praised by our superiors or by someone of importance on whom the future success of our career may depend, we naturally tend to feel elated.

Nevertheless, a certain amount of reflection makes us aware that we are what we are before God, and nothing more. Human praise adds nothing to us, just as human criticism subtracts nothing. In either case we ourselves remain as we were beforehand.

“What thou art, that thou art,” says *The Imitation of Christ*, “nor canst thou be said to be greater than God seeth thee to be. If thou attend diligently to what thou art interiorly, thou wilt

not regard what men say of thee. Man looketh on the face, but God seeth into the heart. Man considereth the actions, but God weigheth the intentions.”¹

Why, then, does praise disturb or exalt us? It is because our lack of humility causes us to desire the vain encomiums of the world and to believe that these make us better and greater than we really are in the sight of God. A man who is genuinely humble remains serenely indifferent to the eulogies of others. He knows that he is what he is in the sight of God, and no more than that. Therefore he does his best to please God and to work for His glory rather than his own advancement.

He is not approved who commends himself, writes St. Paul, *but he whom the Lord commends.*² Let us cease to worry about the plaudits of mankind, but let us live and work conscientiously in the presence of God. Let it be our sole purpose in life to please Him and to promote His glory.

2. Criticism and correction disturb our peace of mind as much as the praise of others. We are filled with resentment and find it hard to control ourselves. Very often, unfortunately, when something is said to us which we consider to be offensive, we are overcome by anger and launch into bitter outbursts of recrimination. Once more, the reason is obvious. It is our lack of humility.

We know quite well that we are no better than we appear to be in the sight of God. Praise adds nothing to our stature, any more than criticism takes from it.

Unfortunately, while we realise this in theory, we do not recognise it in practice. It was because the Saints were meek and humble like Jesus that they reached such heights of spiritual tranquillity in the face of flattery or of reproof.

Even when he was mocked and calumniated, St. Francis de Sales succeeded in maintaining complete self-control and amiability. But this was the result of a long struggle with his natural disposition. Have you even begun to exercise self-control?

3. The following passage from *The Imitation of Christ* is a fitting conclusion to this meditation:

“The good man’s glory is the testimony of a good conscience. Have a good conscience, and thou shalt always have joy. A good conscience can bear very much, and is very joyful in the midst of adversity . . .

“The glory of the good is in their own consciences, and not in the mouth of men. The joy of the just is from God and in God . . .

“Great tranquillity of heart hath he who careth neither for praise nor blame. Easily will he be content and at peace whose conscience is undefiled. Thou art not more holy for being praised nor the worse for being blamed. What thou art, that thou art; nor canst thou be said to be greater than God seeth thee to be.”³

¹ Imit. of Christ, Bk. II, c. 6, 3.

² 2 Cor. 10, 18.

³ Cf. Imit. of Christ, Bk. II.

30th October

HUMILITY, TRANQUILLITY, AND A CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

I. There may have been in our past lives periods of spiritual confusion and unrest which left their mark upon us. There may have been moments of human weakness when we yielded to the attractions of sin and fell miserably.

On these occasions we have only to humble ourselves in the presence of God, to be sorry for our lapses, to ask Jesus for forgiveness, and to resolve with the help of God’s grace never to sin again. In this way we can regain our peace of mind.

Sometimes, too, we are discouraged by severe suffering or by humiliation. In these cases the remedy is the same. We must

humble ourselves before God and remember that we deserve even greater punishment for our sins. If we accept suffering and sorrow in a Christian manner, they purify us and bring us nearer to God.

There are other occasions when we are deeply hurt by our fellow-men, sometimes because of incompatibility of temperament, sometimes because of mutual misunderstanding in difficult situations. In such cases humility and gentleness are also helpful. Virtue cannot solve all of life's problems, but it can bring us nearer to solving many of them. We shall still have to put up with a great deal in our relations with others, but humility and understanding can eventually unravel even the most intricate knots. The practice of these virtues will gain merit for us in the sight of God and will enable us to live in harmony with our neighbour.

2. When a serious misunderstanding arises between our neighbour and ourselves, we must be calm as well as humble. We should never lose our self-control nor let anger or pride disturb our peace of mind. To do so would gain nothing for us and would lead to strained relations with our neighbour. When we are wounded or irritated, the only course is to remain silent, no matter how difficult we may find it to keep quiet. After a while we shall regain our composure and shall be able to discuss in a friendly way the cause of our irritation. If we observe this rule, we shall be able to solve many big problems and shall find it easier to become holy.

3. There is another useful rule which we should observe when we have some difference of opinion with our neighbour, and that is the rule of practical Christian conduct.

It is useless and harmful to fly into a passion and to brood over our rights and other people's wrongs. Such conduct can solve nothing. It is far better to look calmly for the most practical way in which to arrive at a just and charitable solution. Usually there is a certain amount of right on both sides. A calm and

practical discussion is necessary if we are to find the best solution to our problem. A constructive and unprejudiced approach to differences of opinion is helpful to us in our quest for perfection and can solve many problems with which agitated minds would find it impossible to cope.

31st October

MOTIVES OF HUMILITY

1. Humility is the most necessary and the most difficult of the virtues. It is the most necessary because it is the foundation of the entire Christian edifice of spiritual perfection. No stable structure can be built without a firm foundation.

This virtue is also necessary because God gives His grace only to the humble, and without His grace we can gain no supernatural merit. *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*¹

Humility is, moreover, the most difficult of the virtues. It is hard to renounce one's possessions and give them away to the poor in accordance with the evangelical counsel. It is harder to renounce one's wayward instincts and passions. It is even harder, however, to renounce one's own ego with all its immoderate desires. Nevertheless, this is what Christian humility demands of us. We must deny ourselves and acknowledge our nothingness. We must recognise that it is folly to glory in things which do not belong to us, but are merely gifts from God.

It is necessary to practise the virtue of humility continually if we are to become humble. For this purpose it is useful to meditate on the motives which should inspire us to humble ourselves both before God and before men. Our sins constitute one of these motives. All that we are and all that we have in the physical and in the supernatural order are gifts from our Creator and Redeemer, but sin belongs to us alone.

It is we ourselves who are responsible for sin, because in direct opposition to His will we abused the faculties which God gave us. This is surely a reason for humiliating ourselves; sin, which is an offence against God and is our spiritual ruination, is the only thing which we can claim as properly belonging to us. Unfortunately, we have committed innumerable sins in thought, word, deed, and omission; alone and in public, by day and by night, as children and as adults; against the commandments of God, against the precepts of the Church, and against the obligations of our state in life. Our whole existence has been marred by offences and acts of ingratitude against God, our greatest Benefactor.

2. Another motive for humility is our deficiency in virtue. We have received many gifts from God, but what use have we made of them? We have received gifts of nature and of grace, good inspirations, good example, and precious time and opportunity for doing good. On those occasions when the voice of God spoke most clearly in our hearts, we made good resolutions and promised to abandon sin and to walk with greater fervour in the way of perfection. Unfortunately, however, we continue to lag behind. This is a new motive for humbling ourselves and for beseeching from God the gift of perseverance.

3. Finally, there is the transient nature of mortal life. One illness is enough to carry us to the grave, there to rot and to be eaten by worms. It is sufficient for the capillary vessel of the brain to be burst in order to render us incapable of forming a single thought or of uttering a single word. We imagine that we are very important, whereas in fact we are insignificant before God and before the mighty universe. Let us do our best, therefore, to be humble. If we can become as little children, God will be pleased with us and will make us members of His kingdom. *Unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*²

¹ James 4, 6.

² Mt. 18, 3.

NOVEMBER

1st November

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

1. Today's feast should inspire in us a burning desire to become holy. Men long for many things in this world, things which are often useless and even sinful. They desire riches, pleasure, honours, success and material comfort. These things may be lawful, but they cannot satisfy the human heart which is made for God. Whenever we achieve any of our ambitions in this world, are we in fact happy or even perfectly satisfied? The truth is that we are not, because the soul is greater than the objects which surround us. God alone can fill and satisfy it.

Sanctity should be our principal ambition. We should yearn to be more closely united to God so that His Divinity may be reflected in our thoughts and in our actions. If we enjoy God's friendship, we shall become more like God and shall be lifted up above petty mundane considerations. Perhaps we doubt our ability to reach such a high spiritual level? Even so, we should nevertheless desire to reach it, and not just in a passing and indifferent manner, but constantly and actively. We should keep our desire alive by repeating it to ourselves and by continually praying for God's grace to fulfil it. "I intend to become holy," said little Dominic Savio, and he kept the promise which he had made to God. Many people have formed the same resolution, both desert hermits and University professors, both humble workmen and rulers of nations. Since we ought to have the same intention, what is there to prevent us? Let us make this resolution now and put it into effect with the help of God.

2. God addressed the same command to all of us. *You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy.*¹ *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*²

We are all obliged to strive to become holy, to work hard towards this end, and to ask for the grace to sustain us in our efforts. We should not say that sanctity is impossible for us, because everything is possible with God's help. Let us imagine that we are in Heaven and can behold the innumerable choirs of the Blessed enjoying the unlimited and unending happiness of God's company. Nevertheless, they were once people like ourselves, with the same passions, failings, and temptations. They fought valiantly, supported by the grace of God; they conquered and were awarded the palm of victory. Now they enjoy everlasting happiness. Let us remember the words of St. Augustine: "If others, why not I?" If they succeeded in becoming holy, why cannot I do likewise?

3. In these days when the Church is so anxious to foster devotion to the Saints, let us fervently invoke their patronage. They are our brothers and they reach out lovingly to assist us, because they desire us to share in their glory.

As we know, the Church is threefold. There is the Church militant, to which we belong; there is the Church suffering, which consists of the souls in Purgatory; and there is the Church triumphant, which is made up of the Blessed in Heaven. The bond of charity unites all three divisions. We who are still on earth have brothers and sisters in eternal glory who love us and intercede for us. Let us pray to them fervently and constantly. Above all, let us seek to imitate the sanctity which won such glory for them.

¹ Lev. 11, 44; Peter 1, 16.

² Mt. 5, 48.

2nd November

PURGATORY

I. Purgatory is the masterpiece of God's justice and mercy. St. John tells us in the Apocalypse that nothing defiled can enter into the Heavenly Jerusalem.¹

There are very few, however, who are privileged to arrive at the supreme moment of death still wearing their baptismal robe of innocence. Even the just man falls very often, as the Holy Spirit warns us.² We all possess many failings and have been guilty of many sins, either mortal or venial. It is true that we can obtain forgiveness by penance and by receiving the Sacraments, but there still remains the temporal punishment due to our sins. Neither the small penance imposed by the confessor nor our own tiny acts of voluntary mortification are sufficient to satisfy our debt. We cannot be certain, moreover, that we shall be able at the hour of death to cleanse ourselves of all our sins by means of one good confession. Even if we appear before the judgment seat of God without any grave faults, there will still, unfortunately, be many debts to be paid and many imperfections to be purified.

What, then, will happen to us? The justice of God cannot admit us, imperfect and defiled as we are, into the everlasting happiness of the Beatific Vision. Will He reject us, therefore, even as He rejects those who die in mortal sin and are condemned to eternal punishment? This is unthinkable, for the mercy of God is as infinite as His justice. And so there is Purgatory, where the souls of those who have died in the state of grace, but still scarred with imperfections and burdened with debts to be paid, can find a way of purifying themselves and of making themselves worthy of an everlasting reward. Let us thank God for this gift, the last link in the chain of His mercies, which enables us to prepare ourselves for our entry into the Beatific Vision.

2. Devotion to the dead and the belief in a place of expiation and purification after death can be traced back not only to the early days of the Church but even to the dawn of the human race. Although Luther denied the existence of Purgatory, he was compelled to acknowledge the existence of this ancient and universal belief, sanctioned by tradition, by faith, and by human reason. This belief was already present among pagan people,

as is attested by the better-known writers of antiquity such as Homer, Sophocles, Plato, and Virgil, and by ancient funeral inscriptions. Evidence of the belief among the Jews is found in Sacred Scripture, where it is related that, after he had conquered the worshippers of Jamnia, Judas Machabaeus collected twelve thousand drachmas of silver in order to have sacrifices offered for the dead. *It is a holy and wholesome thought, adds the text, to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.*³

3. The clear testimony of the New Testament may also be invoked in support of this teaching. Jesus refers to sins which cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next,⁴ from which the Fathers deduce that there are sins, namely those of a venial nature, which can be forgiven after death. St. Paul, moreover, speaks of imperfections which will be expiated and purged by fire after death.⁵ Obviously, this cannot take place in Hell, but only in Purgatory. It would be impossible to cite here all the testimonies of the Fathers and of theological writers. Nobody can deny that they exist, however, for they combine to build up a tradition which the Council of Trent⁶ gathered together when proclaiming the existence of Purgatory and the obligation of the faithful to pray for the dead who are expiating their sins there.

This is a very consoling doctrine. It is comforting to know that one day we shall find a way of purifying ourselves of all trace of sin and imperfection and that meanwhile we can be spiritually united with our departed loved ones and can help them by our prayers.

¹ Apoc. 21, 27.² Prov. 24, 16.³ 2 Mach. 12, 46.⁴ Cf. Mt. 12, 31-32.⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 3, 10-15.⁶ Sess. XXV.

3rd November

THE PAINS OF PURGATORY

1. The tradition of the Fathers and the ordinary teaching of the Church describe the pains of Purgatory in such a fashion

that they should prompt us to avoid even the smallest sin, not only because it is an offence against the most amiable God, but also because it will be severely punished by Him. This teaching, moreover, should move us to pity for the poor suffering souls who are enduring such torments.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem states that the sum total of the sufferings of this world is nothing in comparison with the sufferings of Purgatory. He adds, moreover, that the pains of Purgatory equal in severity the torments of Hell; the only difference is that the latter are everlasting, whereas the former will have an end. St. Augustine assures us that the least pang of suffering in Purgatory is sharper than all the torments which it is possible to undergo on earth. Moreover, he adds, in comparison with the fire which afflicts the suffering souls, earthly fire is hardly even real. St. Bede the Venerable tells us that even if we could imagine all the tortures to which tyrants subjected the martyrs, such as iron hooks, red-hot pincers, roasting gridirons, and boiling pitch, we should still have failed to form any idea of the pains of Purgatory. But what is the reason for such severe torments? It is that God loves these souls and desires that they be purified of sin as soon as possible and made worthy of infinite happiness. The fires of Purgatory are nourished by a twofold love—the love of God, Who desires the purification of souls, and the love of these souls, who desire to expiate their faults in order to become worthy of being united with Him for ever.

2. In the course of her vivid description of Purgatory, St. Catherine of Genoa writes: "The suffering souls experience such torments as the human tongue could not describe nor the human intellect comprehend unless God Himself revealed them by means of a special grace."

The ordinary teaching of the Church includes fire as the principal torment. However, the Church has never defined the nature of this fire, nor determined whether it is physical or spiritual. It is certain that this fire is as real as the flames of Hell

and is created by God, not to be an instrument of service to men, but to be a means of expiation and purification. This is why it is a far more tormenting fire than that which we know and use on earth. St. Thomas holds that it is actually a physical fire. He meets the objection that material fire could never touch a spiritual soul by saying that even as the soul is affected on earth by the suffering of the body to which it is joined, so it can be subject in the next life to the action of the fires of Purgatory.¹

3. When we have considered the doctrine of the Church on this particular question, we should react in two ways. On the one hand, we should have a great horror of sin, even of venial sin, because it offends the good God and earns for us such fearful punishment. On the other hand, we should offer our sufferings on behalf of the holy souls who are now enduring these torments and who will enjoy one day the everlasting happiness of Heaven. We shall be able to trust in the power of their intercession for us with almighty God, the enjoyment of Whose Beatific Vision we shall have helped them to achieve.

¹ St. Thomas, Suppl., q. 7, a. 3.

4th November

MORE ABOUT THE SUFFERINGS OF PURGATORY

1. Apart from the physical pain which we have considered in the preceding meditation, the souls in Purgatory suffer a much greater torment, which theologians call the pain of loss. St. John Chrysostom writes that the pain of loss, which is the unsatisfied yearning to be united with the Supreme Good, is a far more agonising torment than the flames of a hundred hells. This is because the souls in Purgatory, having been set free from the

bodily confinement which prevented them from seeing the eternal truths in all their clarity, now experience an unceasing and irresistible need to be united with God. Being aware of their own imperfection, however, they undergo a terrible anguish at their inability to satisfy this burning desire. They love God with an immense love and long to enjoy His intimate friendship, but they realise that they will be rejected by His divine justice as long as they have not perfectly expiated their faults.

If we would have a faint idea of the cruel agony of this unsatisfied desire let us recall the keen anguish experienced by the Saints whenever they remembered the sins which they had committed before their conversion. They shed tears of repentance before the Crucifix and inflicted terrifying penances on themselves in reparation for their misdeeds.

What are we doing in order to avoid offending God and to wash away our past transgressions? Let us remember that the divine justice must be satisfied either in this life or in the next. If we fail to make satisfaction now, we shall do so with much greater suffering in Purgatory, where we shall no longer have the benefit of the Sacraments and of Indulgences.

2. The vision of Purgatory accorded to St. Frances of Rome is well known. She saw Purgatory divided into three separate sections. (1) The first was the part farthest from Heaven and bordering, as it were, on Hell. In it two kinds of people were suffering terrible torments, namely, lay folk who had committed grave sins and postponed their conversion until the moment of death, and men and women who had dedicated their lives to God but on account of venial sins, neglect of duty, tepidity, and lack of gratitude for their great vocation, had a heavy debt to pay to divine justice. (2) The second place was the most crowded. Here the physical pain was still unimaginably severe, while the desire to be purified and to be with God was the cause of intense spiritual anguish. The souls in this region, however, were not only resigned to their lot, but even longed for greater sufferings

which would finally wash away the imperfections which kept them apart from God. (3) The third section was the nearest to Heaven and was the abode of purer and more perfect souls. These did not have to endure much sensible pain, but their yearning for God was so insistent that every moment of separation seemed like an eternity.

3. If I were to die now, in which region of Purgatory should I be likely to be confined? I have no way of knowing this, but there is something which I do know with certainty. I know that I should avoid the slightest offence against God, that I should expiate my past sins by prayer and penance, and that I should pray for the suffering souls in Purgatory, for this is a work of mercy which is most pleasing to God.

5th November

THE CONSOLATIONS OF THE SUFFERING SOULS IN PURGATORY

1. The following is an excerpt from a book by a spiritual writer named Father Alberione:

“There is suffering in Purgatory and there is suffering in Hell, but there are essential differences between one and the other. Hell is eternal, while Purgatory is temporal. In Hell there is no hope of salvation, whereas in Purgatory there is the certainty of future happiness in Heaven. Hell is the lasting state of a soul rejected by God, while Purgatory is the temporary state of a soul loved and awaited by God in Heaven. In Hell suffering is without hope and altogether unprofitable, but in Purgatory the purpose of suffering is to become worthy of entering Heaven. Hell is a place for ever cursed by God, whereas Purgatory is a place which He has blessed. Hell is governed by the stern and

exacting justice of God, whereas Purgatory is under the dominion of the divine justice which seeks to be merciful. Hell is the abode of the damned, Purgatory is the abode of the saved, and this earth is the abode of those who are still uncertain of salvation."¹

The writer goes on to examine the three main reasons why there is joy in Purgatory, even in the midst of the most dreadful torments. The first reason is that the suffering souls are sure of eternal salvation. They are confirmed in grace and it is impossible for them to sin any more. No Saint on earth had this wonderful certitude, which makes the sufferings of Purgatory seem desirable to those confined there. In the second place, these souls recognise their own imperfection and need of purification; therefore they are glad to suffer in order to become worthy at last of the happiness of God's company. The third source of consolation is their ardent love for God. Love does not measure or feel sacrifices; it even desires them because it knows that they are a necessary means of achieving an intimate union with the beloved. It is the greatness of their love for the Supreme Good which makes it a joy for the suffering souls to suffer for His sake and for the purpose of being united with Him.

If only we could love God as they love Him, we should avoid and abhor the least imperfection. We should accept with perfect resignation the sorrows and trials of this life as a means of making reparation for our sins, and we should pray often for these suffering souls so that they might at last fulfil their intense desire to be united with their Infinite Good.

2. In her description of Purgatory, St. Catherine of Genoa writes as follows:

"The soul in Purgatory is happy with its lot, but its happiness is similar to that of the martyr at the stake. Its happiness, in other words, is of a pure and supernatural kind which the world could not understand. The martyr allows himself to be put to death rather than offend God; he feels the pain of dying, but despises death because of his ardent love for God. In the same

way, because it realises that God desires and commands its agony, the soul in Purgatory loves Him and is happy to allow Him to refine and purify it spiritually through suffering.”

In one of her ecstasies St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi was accorded a vision of Purgatory so terrifying that it caused her to grow pale and cry out. Suddenly she saw her own recently deceased brother among the suffering souls. “My poor brother!” she exclaimed, “how much you are suffering. Yet I can see, too, how greatly you are consoled. Although you are tortured by fire, you are content because you know that these torments are the prelude to everlasting happiness.”

3. That is the way it is in Purgatory. The suffering souls endure dreadful torments, but they are resigned to the will of God and are happy to suffer indefinitely in order to become holy. Nevertheless, we can and should pray that their sufferings may be minimised and their joy increased while they are awaiting the moment of their liberation and of their entry into eternal glory. The prayers, penances and good works which we offer on their behalf are a great consolation to them and draw God's blessing on ourselves.

6th November

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS AND THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

1. The Communion of Saints is one of the most consoling doctrines of our religion. This dogma assures us that the Church militant, suffering, and triumphant is one family whose members are bound together by the bonds of divine charity. As the Saints in Heaven love and pray for us and for the souls in Purgatory, so the suffering souls love and intercede for us, and so we should

love and pray for them. This is a triple harmony of love and prayer, a hymn which rises to the throne of God from our place of pilgrimage, from the region of expiation where the separated souls are aflame with the desire to be united with their Creator, and from the joyful choirs of Heaven. The result is the pouring of divine grace on ourselves and on the souls in Purgatory.

The souls of the dead, therefore, whether they are among the blessed in Heaven or are expiating their sins in Purgatory, are united to us in that they love us and pray for us. Between them and us there is a real but invisible link, an exchange of thought, of affections, and of prayer. There are all the elements of a true and lasting friendship.

This is a very consoling realisation. We have not lost our dear ones who have gone to God. They are looking down on us, thinking of us, and waiting for us. We in our turn can think of them, love them still, and pray for them.

2. This consoling doctrine of the Communion of Saints is the foundation of devotion towards the faithful departed. The universal Church, both on earth, in Purgatory, and in Heaven, constitutes the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the channel of the divine life of Jesus. This life is not extinguished by death, but only by mortal sin, which makes us like dead limbs separated from the vine which is Christ. The souls of those belonging to us who have died in the state of grace, therefore, are living members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Now, the different members of the human body do not possess a separate life, but are all co-ordinated and directed towards the good of the whole body. In the same way, all the members of the Mystical Body, whether they are exiles on earth, suffering souls in Purgatory, or blessed in Heaven, should help one another so as to promote the welfare of the whole. The blessed in Heaven and the faithful departed certainly do this, but we ought to do the same. We should preserve a bond of love and prayer between ourselves and our loved ones who have departed from this life before us.

3. Let us remember, however, that this will be impossible if we fall into mortal sin and so extinguish in ourselves the divine life which comes to us through the Mystical Body of Christ. In such an unhappy event we shall have become branches separated from the vine, lifeless and rotting. We shall no longer be able to claim brotherhood with the blessed in Heaven or with the holy souls in Purgatory. We shall be nothing but dry wood, destined to feed the everlasting flames of Hell.

7th November

HOW WE CAN HELP THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

1. We have a natural obligation to help the faithful departed, for they are our fellow-men. Are we capable of watching another human being in agony without feeling pity for him? If there is some way in which we can help him, moreover, ought we not to do so? The holy souls are in agony, however; they are on fire with the love of God, yet cannot be united to Him. We have a means of helping them through our prayers and good works.

There is a further obligation on us arising from our religion. They have been redeemed, like ourselves, by the blood of Christ, and God has told us that the same degree of mercy will one day be shown to us which we have shown to others. The time will come when we also shall find ourselves in Purgatory and shall be in need of prayers. If we remember the dead now, they will be in a position one day to do the same for us. Blessed are the merciful, Jesus says, for they will obtain mercy.

When we appear before the judgment seat of God in order to account for the way in which we have spent our lives, He will count as done to Himself whatever we have done to the

poor, hungry, and ill-clad. Only if we have been merciful towards them will He receive us into the kingdom of Heaven. Otherwise He will send us away, accursed for all eternity. Now, the souls in Purgatory are more unfortunate than those who are poor, hungry, and homeless in this world. They hunger for God, they are full of regret for the sins which they have committed, and they languish far from the eternal home for which they belong.

Finally, we have a duty in justice to help these souls. Some of them are our parents, brothers, sisters, friends, and benefactors. Perhaps they are suffering now because they loved us too much, because they wished to make money for us, or because they were led astray by our bad example. It is not only charity, therefore, but justice which obliges us to pray for them.

2. There are many ways in which we can come to the assistance of the faithful departed. (a) We can help them by prayer. This is the simplest way and one which is possible for everybody. When we pray for our dead we feel that we are close to them, and are consoled in our sorrow. Moreover, we can be sure of gaining a great deal in return, for the prayers which they offer on our behalf are very pleasing to God. (b) We can offer Holy Mass for them. When we do this, it is not only we who pray, but Jesus joins with us and offers Himself as a victim of reparation on behalf of the suffering souls. The Mass has an infinite value, and one Mass alone would be enough to empty Purgatory. But the application of its infinite merits are always limited in accordance with the hidden designs of God. It is certain, however, that there is no more effective means of helping the faithful departed. (c) We can offer our good works on their behalf. Every good action has power to satisfy God for some of the debts which we or others have contracted in His regard. Among the good works which we can offer for the souls in Purgatory are Holy Communion, voluntary mortifications, meek accept-

ance of the unavoidable sorrows of life, acts of patience and of compassion, spiritual and corporal works of mercy, indulgences, and almsgiving.

3. In short, there are innumerable means at our disposal of helping to release the holy souls and of establishing them without delay as our intercessors in Heaven. These good works are advantageous to us as well as to them. In Holy Communion we draw closer to God, by almsgiving we grow more detached from worldly possessions, and by penance and mortification we restrain our wayward appetites and passions. At the same time, we know that we are helping those for whom we offer the merits of our deeds, for we are enabling them to be purified as soon as possible of their imperfections and so to enter into the infinite joy of the Beatific Vision of Almighty God.

8th November

THE ADVANTAGES OF DEVOTION TO THE SOULS IN PURGATORY

I. As Sacred Scripture says, it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead.¹ Besides being profitable to them, however, it is profitable to ourselves. There are two reasons for this: (a) Devotion to the faithful departed reminds us that even venial sin, carelessness, and tepidity, will one day be punished with terrible severity. As a result, we are encouraged in our efforts to lead better lives. (b) In the second place, we know that the souls in Purgatory are holy and are already in the antechamber of Paradise, which they yearn to reach but from which they are kept far apart by the imperfections which they have still to purify. If we can help them by our prayers to enter Heaven even a little earlier than they had expected, they will certainly

intercede for us with God at all times and especially at the moment of death. In their gratitude they will implore for us all the graces of which we stand in need. "Whatever we do for the departed souls," says St. Ambrose, "redounds to our own benefit; after death it will be restored to us with interest." While we are assisting our dear ones to ascend as soon as possible into the everlasting happiness of Heaven, it is comforting to know that one day their patronage will enable us to join them there.

2. The story is told of St. John of God that on one occasion when he was finding it difficult to provide for the crowds of sick people whom he had in his hospital, he went about the streets of Granada crying: "My dear brothers, give alms to yourselves." Many were astonished at these words, but the Saint explained that Jesus regards as done to Himself anything which we do for the poor and unfortunate, and that therefore He repays the generous giver handsomely. Since the souls in Purgatory are poor and needy, it is certain that whatever we do for them will redound to our own advantage.

St. Margaret of Cortona had a keen devotion to the faithful departed. It is related of her that when she was dying she saw a band of blessed spirits descending from above in order to escort her into Heaven. These were the countless souls whom her prayers had rescued from the pains of Purgatory. "If only everyone realised," the Curé d'Ars once said to a fellow-priest, "what great influence with God the holy souls in Purgatory possess, and the vast number of favours which we obtain through their intercession, they certainly would not be forgotten. Let us pray earnestly for them, and they will intercede strongly for us." "Whenever I wish to obtain some favour from our Heavenly Father," said St. Catherine of Bologne, "I have recourse to the souls in Purgatory. I beseech them to present my petition to the Divine Majesty in their name, and through their intercession my request is granted."

3. The example of the Saints should inspire us to practise great devotion to the souls in Purgatory. We should ask them to obtain for us everything which we need, but especially the graces necessary for our eternal salvation.

¹ 2 Mach. 12, 46.

9th November

INDULGENCES

1. Indulgences are among the means by which we can help to satisfy the Divine Justice for our own offences and for those of the faithful departed.

Unfortunately, very few Christians understand the true nature of indulgences. As a result they neglect to fulfil the conditions necessary to gain them.

Canon Law defines an indulgence as “the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven, which the proper ecclesiastical authority concedes from the treasury of the church, for the living by way of absolution, and for the dead by way of suffrage” (Canon 911). The main requirement is to be in the state of grace, which sinners can attain by means of the Sacrament of Penance, or by an act of perfect contrition. If properly made, Confession takes away sin and eternal punishment, but not temporal punishment. This may be cancelled by means of penance, prayer, and good works. In the early days of the Church the penitential system was most severe. According to the degree of gravity, different sins drew penances of days, weeks, or months of fasting on bread and water. As times changed, the Church reduced these penalties and granted indulgences instead.

What, we may ask, is the theological basis for these indulgences? It is the spiritual treasury which is at the disposal of the

Church, made up of the infinite merits of our Redeemer and added to by the merits of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. These merits are communicated to us by the Church by reason of the consoling dogma of the Communion of Saints, according to which the Church militant, suffering, and triumphant constitutes one Mystical Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head.

The Church has power to dispose of this immense treasure by reason of the injunction given to her by her Founder when He said to St. Peter: *Whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*¹ There are no reservations; the injunction applies not only to sin, but also to its punishment. It is clear that indulgences are not merely a dispensation from the penitential discipline in the eyes of the Church, as certain heretics held, but also in the sight of God. Indulgences reflect both the mercy and the justice of God. They reflect His justice because complete satisfaction is rendered by the merits of Jesus Christ. They reflect His mercy because these merits are applied to us poor sinners, and also by way of suffrage to the souls of our departed friends.

2. Throughout the centuries indulgences have been regulated by the authority of the Church, which in the course of the Council of Trent² sanctioned their lawfulness and usefulness for the faithful, both living and dead. There is no question of innovation. It can be said quite truly that the first indulgence was granted by Jesus Himself to the repentant thief. *This day*, He told him, *thou shalt be with me in Paradise.* By these words Our Lord remitted not only the sin and the eternal punishment due to it, but also all temporal punishment. In the same way an indulgence was granted by St. Paul when he mitigated the punishment inflicted on the offender at Corinth.³

Indulgences are called plenary when they remit all the temporal punishment due to sin, and partial when it is the intention of the Church to release the sinner from whatever penalties would have been expiated if he had done penance for a certain period

of time in accordance with the ancient discipline. No essential relaxation of practice is intended, because the Church always demands that the sinner should first ensure that he is in the state of grace by making a good Confession. As the Council of Trent insists, he should be sincerely repentant. The Church requires, moreover, that in order to gain a plenary indulgence the penitent should be detached from all affection even towards deliberate venial sin.

3. Indulgences, therefore, are an aid to repentance for sin, not a substitute for it. In granting them the Church is only imitating the merciful spirit of Jesus Christ, Who was always compassionate towards sinners. Let us do our best to make profitable use of the Church's generosity on our own behalf and on behalf of the faithful departed. Let us observe the necessary conditions in order to gain as many indulgences as possible. Every morning we should make the intention of gaining all the indulgences which we can during the day.

¹ Mt. 16, 19.

² Sess. XXV, Decr. de Indulg.

³ 2 Cor., 6-8.

10th November

PRAYER, WORK AND LEISURE

1. The pattern of our lives should be a combination of prayer, work, and leisure. There should be no room, however, for idleness.

Prayer. Prayer is most essential. The life of a Christian should be a continual prayer. As Jesus commanded, we *must always pray and not lose heart.*¹

How can we achieve this? St. Paul has told us. *Whatever you do in word or in work, he says, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*² If we follow his instructions, our lives will really be a prayer. Before we begin

our day's work we shall turn to God and offer Him our labours and our difficulties. During our work we shall raise our minds to God from time to time as Jesus, Mary and Joseph must have done in the home and in the workshop at Nazareth. Whenever we speak, we should remember that we are in the presence of God. Then our conversation and our behaviour will be free from defect and will edify those who are with us. The grace of God can illumine the most ordinary conversations and actions which are in themselves quite indifferent. It is enough to live in a spiritual atmosphere of our own and to keep our thoughts turned towards God while we are living and walking on this earth. If we can aspire to such a spiritual height, then our work will become a prayer pleasing to God, whether it is mental or manual, pleasant or burdensome. God will grant us interior peace, moreover, for we shall be no longer working alone, but Jesus Christ will be working with us by His grace. This is the way the Saints worked, and this is how their lives were a prayer.

2. *Work.* Work is a duty commanded by God, Who after the sin of Adam told him and his descendants: *In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.*³ So work became an obligation and a means of expiation. We are all obliged, therefore, to engage in some kind of work, mental or manual, whether we are rich or poor. Idleness has been condemned by God as the father of all the vices. *Idleness*, warns the Holy Spirit, *is an apt teacher of mischief.*⁴ It is impossible for a man who works and prays to commit sin, both because he lacks the time and because he is close to God. A man who is close to God will certainly never offend Him, whereas the mind of a man who is lazy and inactive is open to the attractions of sin. Let us shun idleness, therefore, and love hard work as a means of making reparation for our sins and of gaining merit before God.

3. *Leisure.* Some of the Saints made it one of their resolutions to take about an hour's recreation every day. They were thinking in terms of rest, however, not of inactivity. Rest is the reward

of labour and is necessary for frail human nature. Idleness, on the other hand, is a vice and the source of sin. We should take our repose only after our work and in consequence of it. Even during recreation we should continue to live in the presence of God and to think of Him from time to time. If we enjoy our leisure in the open air, everything speaks to us of God, for we are surrounded by the flowers and the birds.

When St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus was going for a walk one day, she stopped to admire a tiny flower. Enraptured by its beauty, she exclaimed aloud: "How good you are, O God!" Our recreation can be the source of increased sanctification.

¹ Luke 18, 1.

² Col. 3, 17.

³ Gen. 3, 19.

⁴ Ecclus. 33, 29.

11th November

SENSITIVENESS

1. A single severe glance from our employer or superior is enough to make us anxious. If it is accompanied by a word of rebuke we are thoroughly upset. Why should this be so? It is because we are lacking in the fundamental virtue of humility. We want to keep up appearances and to be held in high regard. If we are frustrated in this ambition, we suffer inwardly.

All this is quite natural, but on this natural foundation we must build the virtue of humility and the desire to serve God alone. If we possess this virtue, we shall continue to be sensitive to insults and humiliations but our suffering will be sanctified and will be meritorious in the sight of God.

We are all pleased when we are praised by others and are hurt when we are criticised, because our natural inclinations are never destroyed. Our sensitivity, however, can be moderated and brought under the control of right reason, whose guide should

be the rule of virtue. It is worth reflecting on what the *Imitation of Christ* has to say in this regard.

“Whenever a man desireth anything inordinately, straight-away he is disquieted within himself. The proud and the covetous are never at rest; the poor and humble in spirit pass their life in abundance of peace. The man who is not yet perfectly dead to self is soon tempted and overcome in little and paltry things. He that is weak in spirit, and in a certain manner as yet carnal, and inclined to things of sense, cannot without difficulty sever himself wholly from earthly desires. And therefore he is often sad when he does withdraw himself; and besides, he is easily moved to anger if anyone thwarts him. And, if he has pursued his inclination, forthwith he is burdened with remorse of conscience for having gone after his passion, which helped him not at all to the peace he looked for. It is by resisting the passions, therefore, and not by serving them, that true peace of heart is to be found. Peace, therefore, is not in the heart of the carnal man, nor in the man who is devoted to outward things, but in the fervent and spiritual man.”¹

“Continual peace dwelleth with the humble, but in the heart of the proud is frequent envy and indignation.”²

2. Our wounded feelings sometimes give rise to an external explosion in the form of bitter and offensive remarks. These always create disharmony and have various unfortunate after-effects.

It is fatal to lose control over ourselves. A man who has surrendered to anger and resentment does not weigh his words and is not responsible for his actions. When the fit has passed, he is left with a sense of humiliation because of his lack of moderation and must suffer the consequences both before God and before his fellow-men in his domestic and social environment. “When the angry man has calmed down,” Seneca truly observed, “he is angry with himself.” “Let anger be foreign to us,” said Cicero, “for an angry man is incapable of acting

correctly or prudently. Anything which is done in a state of agitation cannot be done properly nor can it meet with the approval of the bystanders."³

Let us meditate also on these apt quotations from Sacred Scripture. *A mild answer calms wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*⁴ *An ill-tempered man stirs up strife, but a patient man allays discord.*⁵

3. Let us form the following resolutions: (1) Never to speak or never to make a decision in a moment of anger. (2) To wait until we have regained full self-control and serenity before we make any statement or perform any action. (3) Never to be disturbed by the unpleasant remarks or behaviour of others in our regard. Considering that the Saints actually looked for humiliations and penances, the least we should do is accept those God sends us and offer them to Him.

¹ Bk. I, c. 6.

² Ibid., c. 7, v. 3.

³ De Off., I, 38.

⁴ Prov. 15, 1.

⁵ Prov. 15, 18.

12th November

DAILY PROGRESS

1. Every day of our lives should be a further step towards perfection. Holiness should be our goal in life. If we set before ourselves any illusory targets at which to aim, we are making a serious mistake and shall have cause in the end to appreciate the truth of the prophet's warning: *You have sowed much and brought in little.*¹ Jesus Christ, moreover, has given us this commandment: *You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*²

The ideal is high, certainly, and it is impossible for human resources, but Jesus assures us that nothing is impossible with God.³ We can do nothing without God's help, but with His

grace we can do everything. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*⁴

Naturally, we cannot hope to accomplish everything in one day. We should desire to reach the highest possible level of perfection and ought not to be discouraged by the many difficulties which we are sure to encounter on the way. But it would be presumptuous to expect to achieve perfection in a single moment.

The road to sanctity is long and arduous. It is essential to stride this path resolutely and with complete confidence in God. We should go forward with enthusiasm, not depending on our own poor resources, but on divine grace.

This is a matter of life and death, and here we speak of eternal life. If we cease to advance and fall into indolence and inactivity, God will leave us to ourselves and we shall be lost. A man who is not advancing in the spiritual life must lose ground sooner or later, because he is not obeying the command of Jesus Christ.

2. There are two ways in which we should make constant daily progress. The first is in the removal of our defects and imperfections. As *The Imitation of Christ* insists, we should soon become holy if we were to conquer at least one sin every year. It is opportune at this stage to ask ourselves how many years we have already spent on earth. During these years how many personal defects can we claim to have remedied? Perhaps there was a time when we were better than we are now. If we have wasted time and have abused our Creator's gifts and favours, we should humble ourselves and do penance before God.

Finally, we should resolve to do our best to remedy at least one defect every day. We should select first of all whatever imperfection we know to be the most dangerous. This will be difficult and even heroic work, but it is very necessary. We must work on our own character as a sculptor works on a block of marble, hammering, cutting, and chiselling patiently and perseveringly. With the help of God we shall be successful. Even

as the Saints succeeded, so we shall succeed if we depend on God's grace and make the necessary sacrifices.

3. The second way in which we should make daily spiritual progress is by adorning our soul with virtues. When we have cleansed our soul of the scars of sin, there still remains the positive task of adorning it with Christian virtues. We should begin by acquiring the virtue of humility, which is the foundation of the entire spiritual life. One can never be too humble. It is difficult to become humble and it involves lifelong renunciation and sacrifice.

Once we have acquired this virtue, however, the sunshine and dew of divine grace cause others to spring up beside it. It will be easier then to advance day by day nearer to perfection.

¹ Agg. 1, 6.

² Mt. 5, 48.

³ Cf. Luke 18, 27.

⁴ Phil. 4, 13.

13th November

ALMSGIVING AND SIMPLICITY

1. Some people are so afraid of poverty that they rarely give alms. Let them meditate on these words of St. Cyprian. "You are afraid that if you begin to engage in too many charitable enterprises your substance will be dissipated and you will be reduced to poverty. Have confidence and do not be afraid."¹

That fortune will never be exhausted, he assures us, from which the possessor draws frequently in order to relieve Christ's poor or to perform an act of religion. He does not assure us of this on his own authority, he says, but bases his promise on the evidence of Sacred Scripture.

Speaking through the medium of Solomon, the Holy Spirit says: *He who gives to the poor suffers no want, but he who ignores them gets many a curse.*² In other words, the avaricious and self-

centred man is more likely to be reduced to poverty than the kind and bountiful man.

St. Paul says much the same under the influence of divine inspiration. *He who provides the sower with seed will both give you bread to eat and will multiply your seed, and will increase the growth of the fruits of your justice, that being enriched in all things, you may contribute with simplicity of purpose.*³ The administration of this service, he adds, *not only supplies the wants of the saints, but overflows also in much gratitude to the Lord.*⁴ The poor thank God for the alms which we give them and our prosperity increases as a result.

In the Gospel Our Lord reproaches men for their niggardliness and lack of confidence. *Do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "What are we to put on?" (for after all these things the Gentiles seek), for your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides.*⁵ The man who aims at divine justice, therefore, will not go in want. When the day of judgment comes, moreover, he has Our Lord's promise that he will be given a share in the kingdom for the sake of which he performed his charitable actions.

"You are afraid," says St. Cyprian, "that your substance will be exhausted if you take from it in order to give in charity. You do not realise, wretched man, that while you are afraid of losing your substance you are losing life itself. While you are carefully guarding against the diminution of your possessions, you do not see that you yourself are diminishing. You love money more than life. While you are afraid of expending your wealth for the sake of spiritual gain, you are ruining yourself for the sake of your possessions."

2. There are others who give generously but are anxious to make a good appearance before their fellow-men. It is of these that it has been written that *they have received their reward.*⁶

We should give with holy simplicity in the manner indicated

in the Gospel. *When thou givest alms, do not let thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing.*⁷ Such unostentatious generosity is more pleasing to the poor than the gift itself.

3. Let us meditate on this passage from Hermes' *Pastor*:⁸

“(1) Preserve your simplicity and be good in the manner of children who know nothing of the malice which destroys men's lives. (2) Speak evil of nobody and do not listen to detractors so that you may not be a party to their crime. (3) Be prudent when you are doing good, but pleasant at the same time. Do not care about who is indebted to you and who is not, but give simply to all who are in need from the fruits of your work with which God has provided you. Be generous to everybody, because God does not wish anyone to be deprived of His favours. (4) Everyone who has received must render to God an account of his possessions. He who receives because he is in need will be exempt from blame, but he who receives through duplicity will be answerable for it. (5) He who gives in charity is innocent, because he observes God's commandment in utter simplicity without enquiring to whom he is obliged to give and to whom he is not. The fulfilment of His precept remains pleasing to God. The man who helps his neighbour with guileless nobility will live with God.”

¹ De Opere et eleemosynis, 9-10.

² Prov. 28, 27.

³ 2 Cor. 9, 10.

⁴ Ibid. 9, 12.

⁵ Mt. 6, 31.

⁶ Mt. 6, 2.

⁷ Mt. 6, 3.

⁸ Cf. Vision V.

14th November

GOOD EXAMPLE

I. The Saints achieved a great deal by preaching and by conversation, but they achieved far more by good example. Their spiritual power of personality touched even the most hardened sinners.

It is said of St. Romuald that everyone who visited him experienced great interior happiness. His appearance alone was enough to cheer them. He was so detached from himself and from the things of the world, and so absorbed in God, that he was always smiling. The Curé d'Ars, too, converted more people by the unseen impact of his personal holiness than by the simple sermons which he delivered to the crowds gathered about him.

Unfortunately, quite the opposite influence is exerted by hardened sinners and by self-centred worldlings, and even greater damage is done by those who are immersed in soul-destroying sensuality. The latter exhale the breath of death, and the familiarity of their friendship perverts and corrupts those with whom they come in contact.

Examine your behaviour at home and in society, for it affects not only your own spiritual welfare, but that of your neighbour as well.

2. The Holy Spirit tells us that God entrusts to everyone the care of his neighbour.¹ *Let your light shine before men*, says Jesus Christ, *in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*² St. Paul echoes this counsel when he warns us not to return evil for evil, but to *provide good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.*³ In other words, we are obliged to edify our neighbour by our good example.

Good example is the most effective sermon, and it is a sermon which all of us can and should deliver. We ought to preach this sermon everywhere and at all times—in the Church and outside it, in our family circle and in society, with our superiors, equals and inferiors, when we are speaking and when we are silent, in our behaviour and in our appearance.

3. Above all, we must avoid giving scandal. Jesus Christ strongly condemned this sin, which destroys so many souls. *Woe to the world because of scandals! . . . Woe to the man through whom scandal does come! . . . It were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of*

*the sea.*⁴ If we are compelled to admit that by our behaviour or conversation we have given rise to scandal and have endangered the eternal salvation of our neighbour, let us repent humbly and do our best to repair the damage as far as possible.

Let us henceforth endeavour, moreover, to edify our fellow-men in every possible way. What a consolation it would be for us to know that we had led a soul back to God. It would be more than a consolation; in fact, it would be a guarantee of our own future salvation.

*My brethren, says St. James, if any one of you strays from the truth and someone brings him back, he ought to know that he who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.*⁵

¹ Ecclus. 17, 12.

² Mt. 5, 16.

³ Cf. Rom. 12, 17.

⁴ Mt. 18, 5-7.

⁵ James 5, 19-20.

15th November

CONVERSATION WITH GOD AND WITH MEN

I. Let us recall again the sentence in which *The Imitation of Christ* paraphrases an idea of Seneca.¹ "As often as I have been amongst men, I have returned less a man."² The writer goes on to explain what he means by this. "It is easier to keep silence altogether than not to fall into excess in speaking . . . No man can safely speak but he who loves silence."³

We have all experienced how true it is that when we are frequently in the company of others, we become easily absorbed in matters which are spiritually advantageous neither to ourselves nor to our neighbour. If the people with whom we associate were holy, this would not happen. It is always edifying to hold conversation with a Saint. After such a conversation we go away better Christians than we were beforehand. "Nobody," writes

Tertullian, "is wiser, more faithful, and nobler than the Christian."⁴

Unfortunately, Saints are rare, whereas evil men are common, and idle and foolish men more common still. *Walk with wise men and you will become wise, but the companion of fools will fare badly.*⁵

This does not mean that we should all become hermits, for that is a lofty vocation to which only a few are called. But it remains true that constant chatter with other men is both a waste of time and harmful. So-called society life is dissipating and disedifying.

Converse with men when it is necessary, when it is useful, and when it is polite to do so. At such times let your speech be simple and good and your behaviour edifying.

2. Do not speak too often with men, but speak often with God. We should always be in communication with God, because to converse with God is to pray. Jesus has told us that we ought always to pray.⁶ We have a great need of intimacy with God, for if the life of grace does not flow within us we become like arid branches and fall prey to temptations and to tepidity. In order to remain close to God we must pray constantly. As St. Paul says, *whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*⁷ This is what the Saints did. While their feet walked the earth, their minds were in Heaven.

We should imitate them by trying to cultivate the interior life which will keep us detached from the world and from sin, and always close to God.

3. As a conclusion to this meditation, let us reflect on the following beautiful passage from *The Imitation of Christ*:

"Happy is he whom truth teacheth by itself, not by figures and passing sounds, but as it is in itself. Our own way of thinking and our sense often deceive us, and we see but a little way . . . He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh is delivered from a

multitude of opinions. From the One Word are all things, all things speak this One; and this is the Beginning which also speaketh to us. Without Him no man understandeth or rightly judgeth. He to whom all things are one, who refereth all things to one, and seeth all things in one, may be steadfast in heart, and abide in God at peace.

“O truth! my God! make me one with Thee in everlasting charity.”⁸

¹ Ep. 7.² Bk. I, c. xx, 2.³ Ibid.⁴ De Praes. 3.⁵ Prov. 13, 20.⁶ Luke 18, 1.⁷ Col. 3, 17.⁸ Bk. I, C. 3, 1-2.

16th November

EVIL LITERATURE

I. As far back as 1886 Leo XIII in his Encyclical “*Pergrata Nobis*” deplored the extent to which evil literature was perverting morals and insidiously attacking the faith. Elsewhere he wrote: “Every day we see new falsehoods emerging with unbelievable audacity, both in large volumes and in pamphlets, in periodicals and in newspapers of every kind.”¹ “The yellow press is like a poison which diffuses itself everywhere.”² “The enemies of the Church employ it as the most powerful weapon with which to combat Her. Their evil and disturbing publications are, unfortunately, restrained neither by law nor by public opinion.”³ “We perceive with the utmost sorrow books and newspapers which seem to have been compiled in order to sneer at virtue and to exalt the vilest indecencies.”⁴

The solemn warning of Leo XIII has been repeated over and over again by his successors. His Holiness Pope Pius XII went so far as to declare that today the propagation of evil has been turned into an industry. The unhealthy curiosity of a great many

people, especially of the young, is exploited in order to sell indecent publications which are devoid of any literary value. In every bookstall are displayed gaudy magazines which attract the eye of the passer-by. If he is already the victim of vicious habits he is provided with a further incentive towards evil, or if he is young and innocent the dangerous disturbance which he experiences may be the beginning of an ultimate surrender to his lower instincts.

Since it is obvious, therefore, that the printing press has become one of the most powerful means of diffusing good and evil among individuals and families, let us examine our own attitude towards it. What kind of books and newspapers do we read? Do we support good or evil literature? Our reading, like our friends, shows what we are. If we read worldly, frivolous, or even evil publications, we are injected, perhaps unconsciously, with a subtle spiritual poison. The results may be disastrous.

2. There can be adequate reasons for reading hostile literature, such as for the purposes of study or of apostolic work. In such cases, however, it is necessary to observe the following rules. (1) If the books which we wish to read are on the Index, we must ask and obtain the requisite permission. (2) When a publication is openly pornographic and completely lacking in literary or scientific value, it must be avoided at all costs. It is pointless to protest: "It has no effect on me." This is not true, for sooner or later obscenity poisons the soul. (3) Even when we have obtained permission, for reasons of position or of study, to read immoral literature, we must take care not to cause any scandal. Scandal could be given by reading a book of this kind in public, by passing it on to others, or by leaving it heedlessly in places where it could be found and perused by the ignorant or by the young.

It may be that on these three points we have something to correct in our own conduct.

3. As far as possible, we are also obliged to avoid daily or

weekly newspapers and magazines which are not actually immoral but are given to supplying sensational information, such as scandals, reports of trials, malicious gossip, and so forth. Generally speaking, we ought not to read these indifferent publications for two reasons. (1) Any kind of evil seeps gradually into the soul until it has corrupted it. (2) We have an obligation to support in preference all good literature, especially Catholic newspapers and periodicals. The indifferent attitude which many people adopt towards printed matter is always dangerous and sometimes sinful.

¹ A.L., 1883, p. 262.

² A.L., 1893, p. 340.

³ A.L., 1882.

⁴ A.L., 1888, p. 396.

17th November

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CINEMA, RADIO, AND TELEVISION

1. It is an unfortunate but undeniable fact that man often employs new inventions and discoveries for evil rather than for good purposes. The gifts of God ought to bring us closer to Him, but too often they become through our own fault the means of separating ourselves farther from Him. Everything is good, and not only whatever God has created, but also whatever we ourselves produce by a proper use of the faculties with which our Creator has endowed us.

*Every creature of God is good, says St. Paul, and nothing is to be rejected . . .*¹ These words are still true of the countless inventions of our own era. The cinema, radio, and television are essentially good because they are gifts which God has brought into being through the agency of human intelligence and perseverance. But what use have we been making of them? Take, for instance, the

cinema. It must be admitted that there are very few films today which are edifying or spiritually helpful. Many are positively bad and dangerous, especially to certain branches of the community. Moreover, as Pius XI warned us in his Encyclical on this subject in 1936, many pictures which would otherwise be quite harmless are rendered dangerous because they are interspersed with various kinds of immorality.

Since the greatest evil for a Christian is the loss of God, and this inevitably follows the loss of grace and of the faith, we must observe the following safeguards in our approach to the cinema. (1) We must stay away from any film which might represent a proximate occasion of mortal sin. (2) We must avoid films which are opposed to morals or to the faith, and must see that our families and dependants do likewise. (3) We may attend films which are good or merely entertaining. It is better, however, not to go to the cinema too regularly, for to do so would be a waste of time and could expose us to unforeseen risks. In any case, there are many other amusements, preferably open-air, which are much more beneficial to soul and body.

2. What has been said of the cinema is true also of radio and television. There is one difference, however. We must go out to the cinema, but the radio and the television set are normally in our own homes and are therefore much greater potential instruments of good or of evil. The radio is carried about by many people both in the city and in the country. Television, moreover, has power to take possession of a man through his hearing, vision, imagination and intelligence. It is a vital world on a tiny screen which can attract and fascinate the mind. It is possible to televise sacred ceremonies, the Holy Mass, explanations of the Gospel, and religious or cultural instructions. It is equally possible to present obscene plays and every kind of indecency.

Perhaps there is no other invention with greater power for good or evil than television. This fact imposes grave obligations

on the public authorities, on artists and writers, on the heads of families, and on the community in general. Every good Christian is obliged to be on his guard against the possibility of television becoming a ready instrument of moral damage either to himself or to his neighbour.

3. Let us examine ourselves conscientiously, for we may have much with which to reproach ourselves. If we have been guilty of negligence in the past, let us resolve to do better in future. The wonderful discoveries of civilisation should not be allowed to become the instruments of a new, refined type of barbarianism capable of making us the slaves of sin. Every earnest Catholic should read and meditate on the relevant teaching of His Holiness Pope Pius XII, in the Encyclical "Miranda Prorsus," published in the year 1957.

¹ 1 Tim. 4, 4.

18th November

HAVE WE EVER ABANDONED JESUS?

1. St. John the Evangelist relates how, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus Christ wished to make the people understand that He would give men bread which would be infinitely more precious, namely, Himself, *the bread of life, the living bread that has come down from heaven*. Since the crowd which surrounded Him still failed to understand, He added: *I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*

At this stage, however, the Jews began to argue with one another. *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* Jesus endeavoured to remove all doubt by His reply. *Unless you eat the flesh of the*

*Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you . . . He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me.*¹

When they had heard these words in which Jesus foretold the sublime miracle of the Blessed Eucharist, some of the disciples began to murmur among themselves. *This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?*² When Jesus saw that some of His closest followers were drawing away from Him, He turned to the twelve Apostles. *Do you also wish to go away?* He asked. It was then that Simon Peter made his memorable reply. *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life . . .*³

We also may experience at times a sense of uncertainty concerning the words of Jesus Christ. There are such tremendous mysteries in the Christian religion. But a religion which contained no mysteries could scarcely be true. There are mysteries of nature surrounding us and within us. How can we imagine that there are no mysteries in God, the supreme and most perfect Being? Could it be possible for our petty intellects fully to comprehend God in Himself and in His revelation? Let us bow our heads, therefore, before the mysteries of the Divinity. Let us adore God and repeat with St. Peter: We cannot go away from You, O God, because You have the words of everlasting life.

2. The Apostles did not wish to abandon Jesus in theory, but in practice they did so. Remember the tragic scene in Gethsemane. One Apostle had gone to betray Jesus as if He were a criminal, and to sell Him as if He were a slave. The others were asleep. Jesus, alone and deserted, was praying for ungrateful humanity. He perspired blood and prepared to drink the bitter chalice of humiliation and of the most ignominious form of death. The hired soldiers arrived and arrested Him as a seducer of the people. What was the reaction of the Apostles who had

so often promised to be faithful to their Master until death? The Evangelist tells us, *Then all the disciples left him and fled.*⁴

3. Let us examine ourselves. Are we faithful to Jesus only when everything is going well, when the cross is not too heavy, and when we are not too strongly tempted to sin? There is not much credit in being faithful when everything is easy. We must remain so at all times, even when fidelity requires some great sacrifice. Did not Jesus sacrifice Himself completely for our sakes? Is it not just that we should continue to be generous to our Saviour until death?

If we go away from Jesus, Who is the way, the truth, and the life, our minds will be in darkness and our hearts will grow lifeless. Perhaps we have sometimes wandered away from Jesus and have experienced this darkness and remorse. Only when we are with Jesus is there any purpose and goal in our lives. Only with Him can we hope to have the strength to reach that goal. Only He can dry our tears and assuage our suffering. Only when we are with Jesus have the little joys of this life any meaning, for they are a foretaste of the everlasting happiness of Heaven.

¹ Cf. John 6, 48-58.

² John 6, 61.

³ John 6, 68-69.

⁴ Mt. 26, 56.

19th November

OUR PARISH

1. Just as every Christian belongs to a family, so also he belongs to a parish. The parish should be the necessary complement of the family, in which everyone cannot receive the complete formation which he needs. The family is the first cell in the organism of the Church. The parents should regard their

duties as sacred and, in a way, priestly. They are joined together not only for the purpose of procreating children, but also of educating them. This is a lofty honour and responsibility. They do not possess, however, the means of completing the education of their children. They can do a great deal, but they cannot do everything, for they are not, in fact, priests possessing the necessary means of communicating the supernatural life through the Sacraments and through the authoritative word of God.

Parents are the natural guardians of their children, but in the Church there is a spiritual father to assist them, namely, the parish priest. No good Christian should ignore the existence of his parish priest and of his parish. In his parish church he has received the priceless gift of supernatural life through the Sacrament of Baptism. There, too, he recited his childhood prayers, obtained forgiveness for his sins in the confessional, received the Sacrament of Confirmation, made his First Holy Communion, and received, perhaps, the nuptial blessing at his marriage. There will come a day when he will be borne to his parish church for the last time, to receive from the priest his final blessing and prayers for the repose of his soul. We should love our parish, therefore, in the same way as we love our family, and we should cherish our parish church. It is not enough to visit any church, but we should give pride of place to our own, which houses our spiritual family and holds for us so many precious memories of the past. We ought to make a special point of attending it in order to give good example.

2. There is another reason for frequenting our parish church. Priests today feel very isolated and inadequate to look after all the needs of the faithful entrusted to their care. Good parishioners ought to help them and should consider it an honour to co-operate in the work of the apostolate. The parish clergy are no longer competent to deal with all the situations which arise. Many people keep them at a distance, almost as if they feared them. Good laymen should realise that they can help to bridge

this gap and should be anxious to co-operate in parish work. They can help in the teaching of Christian doctrine to the young and can assist in the various fields of Catholic Action.

This will mean sacrifices, because they have their own personal interests and occupations to absorb their time. But true Christianity entails sacrifice and unceasing dedication.

3. Let us resolve, therefore, to be active in our own parish. Let us give good example by our prayers, by frequenting the Sacraments and attending Holy Mass, and by collaborating with the clergy in the sanctification of souls.

It was for this purpose that we received the Sacrament of Confirmation. We should always remain soldiers of Jesus Christ, especially in our own parish.

20th November

THE MOST TERRIFYING PASSAGE IN THE GOSPEL

1. The preaching of Jesus Christ bears the stamp of gentleness and kindness towards humanity, especially towards sinners. There is, however, one passage in the Gospel which inspires real dread. Let us quote it in full.

When the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory; and before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and he will set the sheep on his right hand but the goats on the left.

Then the king will say to those on his right hand, "Come, blessed of my father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for 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 . . .” Then he will say to those on his left hand, “Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer and say, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?” Then he will answer them, saying, “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me.” And these will go into everlasting punishment . . .¹

These are terrifying words, in the light of which each one of us has something with which to reproach himself.

2. Why should the Eternal Judge punish or reward us in accordance with our own deeds of charity and of mercy towards our unfortunate fellow-men? Simply because Christianity consists mainly of charity, since God Himself is charity. *God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*² When charity is genuine, being the love of God above all things and of our neighbour as ourselves, it is *the bond of perfection*,³ and *bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*⁴ True love, in the Christian sense, presupposes faith, hope and all the other virtues, whereas faith without charity is, as St. Paul says, as futile as *a tinkling cymbal*.⁵ Even the devils have faith, but their faith will not save them. *He who does not love, St. John tells us, abides in death.*⁶

3. Do we hope to be saved and to hear on the day of judgment that welcome invitation: *Come, blessed of my father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*⁷ If we do, let us be charitable. Let us root out the spirit of egoism from our hearts, have compassion on the misfortunes of our needy brethren, and help them in any way we can. Above all, let us recognise the person of Jesus Christ Himself dwelling in His poor, and let us love them even as we love Him. Let us

show our love in deeds, not merely in words, for the Gospel warns us that if we fail to do this we shall be damned for ever.

¹ Cf. Mt. 25, 31-46.

² 1 John 4, 16.

³ Col. 3, 14.

⁴ 1 Cor. 13, 7.

⁵ 1 Cor. 13, 1.

⁶ 1 John 3, 14.

21st November

THE STORMS OF LIFE

I. The Evangelists describe how Jesus got into a boat one day along with His Apostles and set out across the lake of Genesareth.¹ Suddenly a great storm arose, so furious that the waves covered the tiny vessel and threatened to submerge it. The Apostles were terrified and turned to Jesus, but He was asleep. They woke Him, crying out: *Lord, save us! we are perishing!* He sat up and said to them: *Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?* Then He rebuked the wind and the sea, and immediately all was calm again. His followers were astonished. *What manner of man is this,* they asked one another, *that even the wind and the sea obey him?*¹

We also are often subjected to the tempests of life. Sometimes these storms are purely interior, as when our lower impulses threaten to overcome our good resolutions and to submerge our purity of soul. In these serious crises we should turn humbly and fervently to Jesus for help. Sometimes, perhaps, Jesus will seem to be asleep and deaf to our anguished entreaties. But it is never so. He simply wishes to test us, as He tested His Apostles on the lake of Genesareth.

We must persevere. We must tell Him that we do not wish to lose His grace, that we do not wish to fall into sin, but desire to go on loving Him. If our prayers are humble and insistent, we may rest assured that after our moment of trial Jesus Christ will speak to us. At the sound of His voice the tempest will be

stilled and there will come a great calm. Then we shall experience the peace which only God can give.

2. At other times, however, the tempest will come from outside ourselves and will have a shattering effect on our spiritual life. It may be some insult which has seriously wounded us. There may be somebody near to us who has grown quite insufferable. Or perhaps suffering will come to us in the guise of illness, disgrace, or loss of our dear ones. We shall feel lonely and abandoned in the midst of the storm. To whom shall we have recourse in our hour of need? Shall we turn to our fellow-men? Perhaps there will be nobody able to understand us perfectly, or if there is somebody who sympathises with us he may be able to do nothing for us save to utter a few kind words.

3. Let us turn, therefore, to Jesus on the Cross, and to Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist.

The Crucifix will teach us how to suffer with resignation and with love. We shall look upon the Son of God made man in order to take on Himself our sins, to expiate them and to wash them away by His Precious Blood. Before this mystery of infinite love all our anguish and unrest will give way to a Christian acceptance of suffering.

If this is not enough, let us turn to Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist. Let us invite Him into our hearts to calm the tempest and to give us His divine grace, which will conquer every temptation and heal every wound.

¹ Mt. 8, 23-26; Mk. 4, 36-40; Luke 8, 22-25.

22nd November

THE GLORY OF GOD

1. The whole of creation manifests the glory of God. The grass of the field, the trees of the forest, the insects and birds of the air, the creatures on the earth and in the sea, the stars in the

sky—they all speak to us of the power and beauty of the Creator. You also were created by and for God, Who is the beginning and end of all things. In all thoughts, actions, and affections, therefore, you should seek the glory of God. God, indeed, has no need of your small contribution to enhance His glory. His glory is complete and perfect in Himself, in Heaven and in Hell. God does not need you, but you need God. It is your strict obligation not only to proclaim the glory of God, but also to work for its triumph in yourself and in all things.

2. The man who loves God above all things seeks only His glory. The man who loves himself more than he loves God, however, seeks his own petty, worldly glorification and strays away from the main road of life which should lead him towards God. Let us study the behaviour of the Saints, who forgot themselves and thought only of God. In order to please Him, to win His approval, and to co-operate in the manifestation of His glory, they deprived themselves of food and rest and sacrificed themselves entirely for His sake.

Now consider yourself. Perhaps you are still excessively self-centred. Perhaps you love yourself too much and love God too little. Perhaps you try too hard to achieve worldly success and forget that at the end of life your insignificant personal conquests and laurels will seem to you to be so many useless toys on which you have wasted the precious time which God gave you. Think about this and form suitable resolutions for the future.

3. Holiness consists in love—not earthly love, of course, but supernatural love. It consists in seeking God in all things, in doing His will without reservation, in aiming at His glory. All else is dust and ashes. So it will appear to us at the end of life when we shall be able to view ourselves and the world around us in the light of eternity. Herein lies the explanation of the lives of the Saints, lives of sacrifice dedicated to God and to the salvation of souls. "Everything for the greater glory of God" was the motto of St. Ignatius of Loyola. "Everything in the

name of God," said St. Vincent de Paul. "My God is my all," said St. Catherine of Genoa. How do my thoughts, desires, and ambitions compare with these? Are they sincerely directed towards God and towards His glory?

23rd November

THE SALVATION OF SOULS

1. We have only to look around us to realise the sad state of the greater part of human society. Men may be divided into three principal categories—the evil, the indifferent, and the good. The evil are very numerous. The Holy Spirit tells us that the number of fools is infinite.¹ Now, the greatest and most real folly is sin, because sin offends God, our supreme good, our Creator and Redeemer, and because it endangers the salvation of the soul. Nevertheless, countless sins are committed. There is an immense number of people who commit sin not merely through human frailty, but who have abandoned God absolutely by denying or insulting Him and by striving to eradicate Him from the consciousness of their fellow-men.

The second group is that of the indifferent, those for whom God, religion, and the supernatural are quite unimportant. They are content to lead materialistic lives without any thought of eternity. It is enough for them to be able to live, to make money, and to enjoy themselves. Nothing else matters. The number of such people is increasing at an alarming rate. Lastly, there are the good people who desire to become more and more perfect. Unfortunately, there are very few of these now, and one would like to see them displaying greater generosity and enthusiasm.

To which group do you belong? Perhaps you have not yet made up your mind completely to dedicate yourself to the pursuit of sanctity? Perhaps you are still wavering between the alternatives of good and evil?

2. If you still belong to the category of those who desire to

be good and virtuous, remember that your obligations do not stop at this. You are obliged to work as hard as possible for the return of sinners to the fold and for the reawakening of the faith of the indifferent.

A man who really loves God cannot remain inactive when he witnesses the desertion of so many of his fellow-men, the corruption of public and private morals, and the continuous insults offered to the Creator of the human race. Anyone who remains inactive becomes an accomplice.

Everyone is obliged to do his best to prevent the spread of such errors and evils. Do not make the excuse that there is very little which you can do. Although the resources of those who are still faithful may be individually insignificant, they become when combined an irresistible force.

3. Remember that you have three invincible weapons, prayer, mortification, and sacrifice. These are the weapons which can and should be employed in order to convert the world and to establish the kingdom of God.

Remember the countless conversions effected by the Saints as a result of their prayers, mortifications, and heroic sacrifices. Nobody can call himself a Christian who does not love, in a practical manner, his fellow-men, especially unfortunate sinners. Make up your mind to offer up your prayers and sacrifices for their conversion.

¹ Eccles. 1, 15.

24th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE POOR

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, said Jesus, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*¹ We should take care to have a proper understanding of the meaning of these words. Christian perfection does not actually consist in being poor. A man can be poor, even voluntarily so, without being virtuous and without receiving any

blessing thereby. "Christian perfection," explains St. Thomas, "does not essentially consist in voluntary poverty, which is only an instrument of perfection. Therefore it cannot be said that where there is greater poverty, there is greater sanctity. The highest perfection can coexist with great wealth, for we read that Abraham was wealthy and God said to him: 'Walk in my presence and be perfect.'"²

Perfection, then, does not consist in poverty as such, but in detachment from worldly possessions. Whether we are rich or poor, we must have this detachment if we wish to be true followers of Christ. It was God Who created the fruits of the earth and gave them to men. When He had created them He was pleased with His work and declared that all things were good. Evil consists in the abuse of these goods, which in themselves are intended to be aids to perfection. It is necessary, therefore, to preserve the proper hierarchical order of all that is good. We must guard against riveting our ambitions on earthly objects as if they were capable of constituting the goal of our lives.

God has given us these things as possessions, not as ends in themselves. He has ordered us to be masters of the world, not its slaves. Detachment is essential, but not a complete surrender of our possessions. The latter was never commanded, but simply indicated as an evangelical counsel of perfection. The observance of this counsel, however, is valueless if it is not accompanied by detachment. Worldly possessions, such as money, are good servants but bad masters.

2. We have established the principle that wealth is in itself good and is a gift from God, but that "it is good in as far as it leads us towards virtue, and evil in as far as it leads us towards vice."³ We must now insist once more on the necessity of remaining detached from worldly goods and of concentrating our attention primarily on God. It is an unfortunate fact that only too often wealth is a spiritual obstacle, for it diverts our attention away from Heaven and towards worldly objects. If

this happens, some of its worst results can be the worship of money, the destruction of high ideals, indifference to the poverty of others, the vain and selfish search for happiness on this earth, and complete spiritual blindness. This is why it is more difficult for the rich man than for the poor man to save his soul.

*If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor.*⁴ This is an evangelical counsel which we may have neither the courage nor the vocation to pursue. At least, however, let us seek to purify ourselves of all attachment to wealth. If we have riches, moreover, let us do our best to use them as instruments of virtue.

3. Let us remember the warning of St. Paul. *Those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many useless and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and damnation. For covetousness is the root of all evils.*⁵ If we are rich, therefore, let us use our wealth in order to do good. If we are poor, let us console ourselves with the reflection that it is easier for the poor to gain Heaven. "The poor man who lacks wisdom is afflicted by a double misfortune; he can neither enjoy the goods of this world, nor hope to enjoy those of the other."⁶

Let us all, both rich and poor, seek the only true riches, which are holiness and the grace of God. If we wish, moreover, to enjoy the blessedness of poverty of spirit, let us be detached not only from wealth, but also from worldly honour and glory. Knowledge which serves to make us proud and ostentatious is regarded as folly in the sight of God.

¹ Mt. 5, 3.

² S. Th., 11-11, q. 185, a. 6 ad 1.

³ Contra G., III, 134.

⁴ Mt. 19, 21.

⁵ 1 Tim. 6, 9-10.

⁶ St. John Climacus, "Scala Paradisi," VII, n. 113.

25th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MEEK

I. Charity, as St. Thomas says, is the source of all the virtues.¹ This includes meekness, or that quality of moderation by which

a Christian ought to govern his passions, especially anger, and keep them subject to the control of reason. This virtue is opposed to pride and to vanity in that these passions, when wounded, culminate in outbursts of anger and in quests for revenge.

Meekness is not simply a form of apathy or of good-natured affability. On the contrary, it is based both on humility and on fortitude. It feels insult and ingratitude, and does not remove the suffering which accompanies them, but it demands the heroism of silence and of charitable behaviour towards those who hurt us. For this reason it is not identical with weakness, but requires spiritual fortitude because it makes a man complete master of himself.² Anger is not always sinful, as the Holy Spirit indicates.³ If it remains subject to the control of reason and of charity, indeed, it is only a reaction against evil and can exist alongside Christian meekness. It is fatal, however, to allow anger to become blind and tyrannical, for it will then betray a man into hatred and vengefulness. It will grow noisy and vulgar, give scandal to others, and leave in the soul a sense of restlessness and of vexation.⁴ "If the Holy Spirit may be called the peace of the soul, uncontrolled anger may be called its disturber. Nothing is more hostile than anger to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us."⁵

Let us resolve never to allow ourselves to be led away by immoderate anger, but to preserve at all times our peace of soul.

2. *Learn from me*, said Jesus when He proposed Himself to us as our model, *for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.*⁶ *By your patience*, He said on another occasion, *you will win your souls.*⁷ *Love your enemies*, He said also, *do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.*⁸

If we obey this lofty teaching, we shall have peace of soul. We shall not be easily annoyed, but shall rather regret the mis-

deeds and unhappiness of those who unjustly offend us. Moreover, we shall be able to persuade our fellow-men to follow the path of virtue. This is why the Psalmist says that *the meek shall possess the land, they shall delight in abounding peace.*⁹ *Blessed are the meek,* Jesus repeats in the Sermon on the Mount, *for they shall possess the earth.*¹⁰

What is meant by this promise? Tyrants, persecutors, and evil-doers have passed away and are remembered with bitterness and execration. But the Saints still hold sway over the world and dominate the minds and hearts of millions, winning universal love and veneration. We should imitate the gentleness which can give such peace and exert such influence.

3. St. John Climacus notes that there are three levels of meekness.¹¹ The first grade, he says, consists in enduring with difficulty the injuries done to us. The second consists in enduring them without displeasure, and the third in regarding them as an honour. Those who reach the first level are to be congratulated, those who reach the second are to be applauded, but those in the third and highest category are really blessed by God. "One day," he says, "I saw three monks receiving the same insult. The first was offended but said nothing; the second was not displeased on his own account, but regretted the offence against Almighty God; the third wept for the fault of his neighbour." The first monk, the Saint comments, feared God; the second loved God; and the third loved both God and his fellow-man.

At what stage of perfection in this virtue can we claim to have arrived? If we desire to be sincere Christians, we must realise that we ought to have achieved at least the first level and should hope to advance eventually as far as the third and most perfect grade.

¹ S. Th., 11-11, q. 157, a. 2.

² Cf. S. Th., 11-11, q. 157, a. 4.

³ Ps. 4, 5.

⁴ Cf. "Philothea," Bk. III, c. 9.

⁵ St. John Climacus, "Scala Paradisi," p. 286.

⁶ Mt. 11, 30.

⁷ Luke 21, 19.

⁸ Mt. 5, 44.

⁹ Ps. 36, 11.

¹⁰ Mt. 5, 4.

¹¹ Scala Paradisi, pp. 296-298.

26th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO MOURN

1. *Blessed are they who mourn*,¹ says Jesus Christ, in direct contrast to the opinion of the world, which believes that happiness is to be found in merrymaking. Who is right? The Gospel does not forbid us to rejoice; indeed, a blessing was given to the wedding celebration in Cana. This, however, was a manifestation of good and honest joy. It is the immoderate revelling of irresponsible worldlings and sinners which is condemned in the Gospel. God does not promise these any of His consolations, but only remorse and, perhaps, despair. On the other hand, those who suffer are called blessed by Jesus Christ, Who has promised to console them. The consolations which they will receive are those which spring from their repentance, from the forgiveness which they obtain for their sins, and from the expectation of everlasting life, which is promised to those who choose the royal road of the Cross. They will also enjoy the consolations of contemplation and of the love of God.

The Christian sheds tears of sadness, of repentance, and of joy. He is sometimes sad because he is sensitive to the evil which exists in the world. When he sees so many of his fellow-men going from sin to sin on the downward slope towards damnation, he is saddened and longs to remedy this situation as much as possible by prayer, good example, and penance.

Perhaps you are indifferent to the evil which is being perpetrated in the world? Perhaps nothing has power to upset you apart from your own petty troubles and frustrated ambitions? This kind of sadness is not pleasing to God.

Another motive for sadness is the great physical and moral suffering which afflicts so many of our brethren. We should be

generous in rendering whatever assistance we can, generous also in our understanding and in our sympathy. Very often a single gesture of compassion towards a man who is suffering is of greater value than a substantial alms which is offered with coldness and indifference.

2. As well as regretting the evils which beset humanity, the Christian should also shed tears of repentance for his sins. Our sins are so many that they demand penance and reparation. St. Aloysius Gonzaga wept whenever he recalled the peccadilloes of his childhood, which were hardly serious enough to be real sins. We have sinned, and may be sinners still, but do we weep for our transgressions?

A sincere Christian is not content merely to regret his sins and to pray for forgiveness, but he imposes on himself voluntary penances in expiation of his own offences and of the offences of others. Tears of repentance are blessed by God, Who forgives and pardons those who mourn for their transgressions.

3. Finally, the Christian will sometimes shed tears of joy. There are some people who are not easily moved. Rigid and inflexible, they proceed in all things with mathematical precision and cannot be swayed by the promptings of the heart. They are incapable of shedding a tear. If we love God sincerely, however, we shall have what was called by the Fathers the gift of tears. It is because we know God so little that we love Him so little. If we loved Him fervently, the contemplations of His infinite goodness and mercy would move us to tears of love and of joy. So it was with the Saints in the presence of the Crucifix and of the Blessed Sacrament, and in the presence of the marvels of creation. We are incapable of shedding tears of love and of joy because we know and love God so little. "Our love and knowledge of God are imperfect,"² writes St. Thomas. We are too absorbed in worldly vanities to be capable of such heartfelt

joy and love. Let us meditate more often and love God more fervently, and He will grant us the gift of tears.

¹ Mt. 5, 5.

² S. Th., I-II, q. 68, a. 2.

27th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE

1. *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice*, says Jesus Christ, *for they shall be satisfied*.¹ These words oblige us to seek justice in our actions if we desire the happiness which Our Lord promises to the just.

We must understand, of course, what is intended here by the word "justice." It may be interpreted in two ways. According to its most common meaning, justice is the cardinal virtue which obliges us to give every man his due. Often in Sacred Scripture, however, the word is synonymous with perfection or holiness; that is, it is the synthesis of all the virtues. It is in this sense that Jesus employs the term when He says: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides*.²

In its fullest sense, then, justice embraces our relations with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbour. In the first place, we must be just towards God and, therefore, in accordance with the Gospel precept, we must *render to God the things that are God's*.³ Since everything belongs to God, our Creator and Redeemer, we must offer everything to Him, including ourselves, all that we are and all that we possess. We have only obligations in regard to God, and no rights, because we have received everything from Him. We ought to obey Him, therefore, as our supreme lawgiver. We ought to adore Him and to love Him with a greater love that we have for any creature or

for ourselves, because He is the highest good which merits all our love and which alone can satisfy us. We should express our love, moreover, by our actions and by the complete dedication of ourselves to His honour and glory.

Justice, then, is in fact Christian perfection and is the synthesis of all the virtues. That great pagan writer, Cicero, had already perceived this when he wrote that "piety is the foundation of all the virtues,"⁴ and that "piety is justice in regard to God."⁵ Justice in our relations with God demands that we adore, love, and obey Him. In this way we lay the basis of all the virtues.

2. We must also be just towards ourselves. God has established a hierarchy of faculties in human nature. There are the lower faculties, which are often moved to action by our passions, and above these there is right reason, which ought to govern all else through the will. According to St. Thomas, the rule of right reason within us should be comparable to that of God in the universe.⁶ "It is fitting," he says elsewhere, "that everything in man should be subject to reason."⁷ St. Augustine observes that, as the lower faculties should obey the intellect, so the intellect should be subject to God and should fulfil His holy law.⁸

In this way there exists in us absolute justice, which is the harmony of perfection. If the passions, however, rebel and dethrone reason, or if reason revolts against God, there follows the degradation of human nature, the triumph of sin, remorse, and spiritual ruin.

3. We must be just, finally, in our dealings with others. This rules out theft, homicide, detraction, calumny, and hatred of our neighbour. We can be unjust to our neighbour not only in material things, but also in the moral order. Christian justice, moreover, makes many demands on us which we do not sufficiently consider. If our neighbour is hungry, we are obliged to assuage his hunger. If he is ill-clad, homeless, or out of work, the Gospel tells us that we are obliged to help him and to

console him by every means in our power, even if this necessitates sacrifice on our part. This is the Christian justice without which neither faith nor charity can survive. The man who lacks this virtue will one day be condemned by the Supreme Judge with the terrifying words: "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire."

¹ Mt. 5, 6.² Mt. 6, 33.³ Mt. 22, 21.⁴ Planc., 12.⁵ Nat. D., I, 41.⁶ De Regim. Principum, I, 12.⁷ S. Th., I-II, q. 100, a. 2 ad 1.⁸ Cf. De Serm. Domini in Monte, Bk. I, c. 2.

28th November

THE THIRST FOR JUSTICE

I. Jesus commands us in the Beatitudes to seek justice, that is, perfection in the fulfilment of our obligations to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour. He commands us, moreover, to hunger and thirst for this justice, which is identical with holiness.

When Christ tells us to hunger and thirst for justice, He imposes on us the obligation of doing our very best to acquire the virtue of Christian justice which is the synthesis of all the virtues. We must beware, therefore, of laziness, apathy, tepidity, or mediocrity, for our advance in spiritual perfection must be continuous. There must be no hesitation or backsliding. The high target which God has set for us demands hard work and boundless generosity on our part. Jesus Christ loved us so much that He gave Himself entirely for us and shed His Precious Blood to the last drop for our redemption. How can we possibly be niggardly or half-hearted in our relations with Him?

Whenever God's cause is at stake, whether in our efforts to achieve our own spiritual perfection or in the fulfilment of our obligations towards our neighbour, we should never refuse any-

thing, but should display absolute dedication to God and to our fellow-man. "Let us hunger," said St. Catherine of Siena, "for God's honour and for the salvation of souls."¹ The hunger and thirst for justice, nourished by the love of God and of our neighbour, should exclude all mediocrity and selfishness from our lives. It should urge us on, as it did the Saints, towards the highest pinnacles of sanctity.

2. Many people, unfortunately, hunger and thirst for wealth, for pleasure, and for honour. In practice, if not in theory, they forget all about their personal sanctification and the welfare of their neighbour. They pray, certainly, and they go to church, give alms, and carry out the duties of their station in life conscientiously from morning until night. They may even engage in many external works of charity on their neighbour's behalf. But what is their dominant thought and their principal ambition? To keep up appearances, to be praised and esteemed, to be successful in their career . . . This, however, is not justice or Christian perfection, but corresponds to the attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees, who did not seek the kingdom of Heaven, but their own interests.² Of these it is written that *they have received their reward*.³ They have not sought God, but themselves. Therefore they can never have God or His everlasting happiness as their reward. They must be content with the insignificant and passing glory of this world. Indeed, on many occasions they will be unable to gain even this much and will find that they have laboured in vain.

The envious man will even find cause for personal sorrow and unhappiness in the welfare and in the success of others. He would have nobody wealthy, respected, or happy in the world but himself. Even when the zealous man is working for a good cause, he is not concerned with it, but only with himself. He identifies his own ego with the cause for which he is fighting.

Let us think deeply about our own secret ambitions. Let us examine our thoughts, affections, desires, and actions in order

to make sure that their primary object is the glory of God and the triumph of His reign in the universe. If we find blemishes, distortions, or tepidity, we must revive and purify our love of God.

¹ Brev. di perfezione, p. 81.

² Cf. Mt. 5, 46-47.

³ Mt. 6, 2.

29th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MERCIFUL

I. Let us meditate now on the mercy of God, which is infinite even as His justice is infinite. "His mercy," says St. Thomas, "does not subtract from His justice, but is the fulness and the perfection of that justice."¹ All the merits which we can acquire in the sight of God derive from His gratuitous gift of grace. God's mercy and justice, therefore, are fused together in a wonderful harmony which claims our gratitude and fidelity.

References to the mercy of God are numerous in Sacred Scripture. *You, Lord, are good and forgiving*, says the Psalmist, *abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.*² *Blessed be the Lord*, we read elsewhere, *my rock, . . . my refuge and my fortress, my stronghold, my deliverer . . .*³ *Goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.*⁴

When we leave the Old Testament and open the Gospel, we discover that it is a record of the goodness and mercy of God. We have only to recall Christ's forgiveness of the Magdalen when she wept at His feet for her faults; the merciful judgment which He passed on the poor adulteress; His loving glance in the direction of St. Peter, who had denied Him; the grace so miraculously granted to St. Paul on the road to Damascus; and the parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and the

good shepherd who went to search for the lost sheep. Finally, there are the consoling words to the repentant thief: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." When we read this chronicle of infinite goodness and mercy, we should experience a boundless hope and confidence. It does not matter how great our sins or our ingratitude may have been. Once we have repented, God is ready to forgive us and to receive us with open arms.

2. Since God is so merciful to us, however, He requires us to be good and merciful to our neighbour. *Blessed are the merciful*, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, *for they shall obtain mercy.*⁵ St. James adds a stern warning. *Judgment, he says, is without mercy to him who has not shown mercy; but mercy triumphs over judgment.*⁶ If we hope to receive God's mercy, we must show compassion to those who are poor or unfortunate in any way, even to the greatest sinners. In the presence of so much need and misfortune in the world, avarice, miserliness, selfishness or indifference cry out to God for retribution. If we are not prepared to give, nothing will be given to us. If we refuse to forgive, neither shall we be forgiven. If we do not love, neither shall we be loved.

3. Let us remember that we have often made ourselves God's enemies by our sins. We were often in need when we were deprived of divine grace. On these occasions God was merciful to us, for He granted us His forgiveness and His friendship. These gifts of God place an obligation on us to behave in the same way to those who are in need by assisting them willingly and generously, and to those who are unhappy by consoling them as far as possible.

Let us remember the great principle which Jesus Christ has given us. *Even as you wish men to do to you, so also do you to them . . . Do good to those who hate you . . . Do not judge, and you shall not be judged; do not condemn and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven, give, and it shall be given to you . . .*⁷ *With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.*⁸ So it will be on

the day of death when we shall have to appear before the Supreme Judge.

Let us be generous throughout life in giving help and consolation to others. It is more blessed to give than to receive, as the Gospel says. By giving we shall find a little happiness even in this world, and shall be certain that one day the most merciful Judge will pardon and embrace us.

¹ S. Th., I, q. 21, a. 3 ad 2.

² Ps. 85, 5.

³ Ps. 143, 2.

⁴ Ps. 22, 6.

⁵ Mt. 5, 7.

⁶ James 2, 12.

⁷ Cf. Luke 6, 30-38.

⁸ Mt. 7, 1.

30th November

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CLEAN OF HEART

1. *Blessed are the clean of heart*, says Jesus in the Beatitudes, *for they shall see God.*¹ *The sensual man*, adds St. Paul, *does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God.*²

How true this is. When the flesh gains control over the spirit and our lower instincts enslave the intellect, we are overcome by confusion and spiritual blindness. No longer can we see God's reflection in created things; no longer do we hear His voice. Impurity and sensuality lead to disregard for the law of God, whereas purity of heart makes it easy for us to love His law.

One day, as was his custom, St. Joseph Cafasso went to the prison to visit the convicts. Among them there was a hardened old sinner who was interested neither in God nor in confessing his sins. The Saint met him and tried to persuade him to kneel down and make his confession. "I do not believe in God," replied the old man. The Saint simply looked at him. "Kneel down," he said, "confess your sins, and afterwards you will believe." It turned out as he had predicted. The old crime-hardened sinner told his sins, wept for them, and became a new

man. It was as if the scales had fallen from his eyes, which now saw God clearly once more. Through the forgiveness of his sins he found again the way of supernatural love.

We should be grateful to God that we are not in the same state as this poor prisoner was, but it is probable that we have been often disturbed by impure suggestions. On these occasions we may have lost sight of God and our high and pure ideals may have suffered an eclipse. We must preserve our chastity, however. With this purpose in view we should renew our good resolutions in the presence of God and should constantly implore His grace and the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

2. The clean of heart will see God. St. Thomas observes that the heart may and should be purified in two ways, even as God may be seen in two ways.³ The first essential is to purify the disturbed passions, which blind the soul to heavenly things. The second is to cleanse the mind and to make it immune from error and from evil fancies so that it may be permanently enlightened by God.

Similarly, the vision of God is twofold. When we see God perfectly, we see His Divine Essence, and such happiness is possible only in the Beatific Vision. There is also an imperfect vision of God, by which we see Him not in Himself but in created things. We can and should have this vision in this life. All the wonders of creation are rays of the eternal beauty of God. Creatures, therefore, should form for us a mystical ladder which leads us to God. We should never become entangled with transient worldly goods, but should see and love God in them all. The Saints were clean of heart and could see God more clearly than the most learned scholars.

3. Let us conclude this meditation with an appropriate prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas. "Make my heart watchful, O God, so that no vain thought may distract it from You. Make it noble, so that it may never be seduced by any base affection. Make it upright, so that no evil intention may defile it. Make it steadfast,

so that troubles may not dismay it. Make it free, so that it may not yield to the onslaughts of passion. Grant me, my God, the intelligence to understand You, the love to seek You, the wisdom to find You, words to please You, the perseverance to wait faithfully for You, and the hope of embracing You at last. Grant that I, a repentant sinner, may bear Your chastisements with resignation. Poor pilgrim that I am, may I draw on the treasury of Your grace and may I one day be eternally happy with you in heavenly glory. Amen.”

¹ Mt. 5, 8.

² 1 Cor. 2, 14.

³ S. Th., II-II, q. 8, A. 7.

DECEMBER

1st December

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PEACEMAKERS

1. The spirit of peace pervades the Gospel. When Jesus is born, choirs of Angels sing above the stable in Bethlehem: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will.*¹ When our Saviour has risen gloriously from the dead, He appears to His disciples and greets them with the words: *Peace be to you.* Finally, when He is departing from this earth He leaves His peace to His followers as their inheritance. *Peace I leave with you,* He says to them, *my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, or be afraid.*²

Exactly what is the peace of Jesus Christ? It is much different from worldly peace, presuming that the world can give some kind of peace. St. Paul says of the Saviour that *he himself is our peace.*³ How are we to understand what is meant by this? The Apostle himself explains when he writes: *Having been justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁴ Jesus Christ, therefore, is our peacemaker. He has shouldered our iniquities and has offered Himself to the Father as a victim of expiation and of reconciliation. It is at the price of Christ's precious blood that we have regained peace with God and freedom from our sins. This is the peace which our Lord has given us. Let us remember, however, that if we return to the slavery of sin we shall lose at once the jewel of peace which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us. *There is no peace to the wicked.*⁵ We have experienced on many occasions how true this is. Sin destroys peace of soul because it deprives us of Jesus, without Whom

peace cannot survive. Let us resolve, therefore, to remain always close to our Lord and far from sin. Then only shall we be able to preserve our peace of mind in the midst of temptations and of earthly sorrows.

2. We should not imagine, however, that the peace which Jesus brought to us is a lifeless peace like that of a cemetery. On the contrary, it is the peace of conquest, a living peace. It cannot be attained by the sluggard who is aiming at an easy and comfortable existence, but by the generous warrior who is always prepared to throw himself into the fight for virtue, for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls.

The peace of Jesus Christ is a victory over the evil which is rampant within us and around us. It demands vigilance, strife, and perseverance in fidelity to our Lord. It requires the spirit of sacrifice, the love of God, and dedication to the welfare of our fellow-men. It is the fruit of internal and external combat. It excludes all rancour, envy, detraction, and malice, which is why it costs so much hardship and conflict. When a man has gained the victory, however, he experiences that wonderful spiritual tranquillity which God alone can give.

3. *Blessed are the peacemakers*, said Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, *for they shall be called children of God.*⁶

True Christian peace, which accompanies the perfect control of the passions and complete dedication to God's cause, makes us like God and enables us by His grace to become His adopted children. He is the God of peace, in Whom there is no conflict, but only perfect order and harmony. Since He is pure act, He understands Himself fully in all His beauty and perfection, and knowing Himself He loves Himself. He is peace, in an active and not in a passive sense. For this reason the peacemakers are singled out in a special way as the children of God. In other words, they become like God when they acquire that interior

tranquillity which is the fruit of virtue and of victory over the flesh. With the help of divine grace, we should do our utmost to gain this peace.

¹ Luke 2, 14.² John 14, 27.³ Eph. 2, 14.⁴ Rom. 5, 1.⁵ Is. 48, 22.⁶ Mt. 5, 9.

2nd December

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO SUFFER PERSECUTION

1. It would seem impossible that suffering and persecution could bring us happiness. Yet we have our Lord's assurance for it. *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, He says, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake. Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in heaven.*¹

Not only is this true of persecution borne in defence of the faith and of the Church, but it is equally true of any kind of trouble and suffering as long as it is endured for the love of God. *Rejoice, writes St. Peter, in so far as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that you may also rejoice with exultation in the revelation of his glory.*²

"It is good for us now and then," *The Imitation of Christ* assures us, "to have some troubles and adversities; for oftentimes they make a man enter into himself, that he may know that he is an exile, and place not his hopes in anything of the world. It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradictions, and to allow people to think ill and slightingly of us, even when we do and mean well. These are often helps to humility, and rid us of vain

glory. For then we more earnestly seek God to be witness of what passes within us, when outwardly we are slighted by men, and incur their discredit."³

This is a repetition of the teaching of Jesus Christ, Who said: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*⁴

The happiness which our Lord promises us is that which results from our own self-renewal and from the acceptance of our cross. This happiness is not easy to acquire, because our selfish and sensual impulses, as well as the insults of others, seem to be for ever stirring up a nest of vipers inside us. Too often our hearts are overflowing, not with happiness, but with rebellion. How can we remedy this? There is only one way. We must love God so much that we are prepared to endure everything willingly for love of Him. Those who suffer are blessed, therefore, only on one condition, namely, on condition that they suffer for love of God.

2. Why did God will to grant us happiness only on this condition that we deny ourselves and carry the cross with resignation? The reason is that we should no longer be ourselves, but should belong entirely to God, and should no longer live our own lives, as St. Paul expresses it, but should live the life of Jesus Christ. We ought to become like Him, the Man of sorrows Who redeemed us at the price of His Precious Blood and forgave His executioners from the Cross. We must suffer, moreover, so that by our suffering we may expiate our sins, purify our souls, detach ourselves from the world, and begin to lead a heavenly life even on this earth.

We should not imagine that this will make our lives sad and dreary. On the contrary, it will fill them with the lasting joy which God sends from on high. Let us acquire the peace which is founded on complete control of the passions, on absolute dedication to God, and on the power of charity, which can

overcome all obstacles. Before we can acquire it, of course, we must be enlightened and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. It was not until after Pentecost that the Apostles achieved this happiness, so that *they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*⁵

3. Let us implore the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and to grant us this serene joy, which is a reflection of the happiness of Heaven.

¹ Mt. 5, 9-12.

² 1 Peter 4, 13.

³ Bk. I, c. 12.

⁴ Luke 9, 23.

⁵ Acts 5, 41.

3rd December

RECOLLECTION

1. The Holy Spirit places the following words on the lips of the prophet Jeremias. *With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart.*¹ Dissipation is the mark of the worldly and of the mediocre. The worldly is dissipated because instead of seeking happiness in God he looks for it in earthly pleasures and even in sin. The mediocre Christian, on the other hand, oscillates between God and the world. He fails to make a definite choice between virtue and sacrifice on one side and his own comfort and satisfaction on the other.

The dissipated soul is absorbed in many things and has no time to reflect on the eternal truths or to think of God and of spiritual progress. As a result, it is incapable of solid virtue, or if it achieves this for a while it soon evaporates. God does not speak to the dissipated, but only to the recollected. The man who is recollected retires silently into the presence of God whenever he can. He derives consolation from conversation with God and responds generously to His inspirations. The man who is dissipated wastes the graces which God gives him, is deaf to His

appeals, and because he is too much in contact with material things ends by forgetting Heaven and by being drawn by His passions towards spiritual destruction. By depriving us of God's grace, dissipation leads to sin and to the death of the soul. Have we not had personal experience of this?

2. There is a perfect picture of the spiritual and recollected man in *The Imitation of Christ*.

"The man of interior life soon recollecteth himself, because he never wholly poureth forth himself upon exterior things. Exterior labour is no prejudice to him, nor any employment necessary for the time; but as things happen, so he accommodateth himself to them. He who is well disposed and orderly in his interior is not concerned about the strange and perverse doings of men."²

The Imitation of Christ also contains the following passage on the love of solitude.

"Seek a convenient time to attend to thyself; and reflect often upon the benefits of God to thee. Let curiosities alone. Read such matters as may produce compunction rather than give occupation. If thou wilt withdraw from superfluous talking, and idle visitings, and from hearing new things and rumours, thou wilt find time sufficient and proper to spend in good meditations. The greatest Saints shunned the company of men when they could, and chose rather to live unto God in secret. As often as I have been amongst men, said one, I have returned less a man. This we too often experience when we talk long."³

"The cell continually dwelt in groweth sweet," the same chapter continues, "but ill guarded, it begetteth weariness."⁴

3. We may imagine that all this applies only to monks, but that is not so. We all need interior recollection, and we can find it even during our work and in the midst of turmoil and confusion. If we fail to find it, moreover, it is too bad for us, as *The Imitation of Christ* warns us. "Peace is not in the heart of the carnal man,

nor in the man who is devoted to outward things, but in the fervent and spiritual man.”⁵

Let us make sure, therefore, that we shall not be distracted by worldly affairs. In the midst of all our occupations let us preserve a spirit of detachment and live in the presence of God. May God be our first thought and our first desire, and may He be the true goal of all our actions.

¹ Jer. 12, 11.

² Bk. II, c. 1, 7.

³ Bk. I, c. 20, 1-2.

⁴ Bk. I, c. 20, 5.

⁵ Bk. I, c. 6, 2.

4th December

TRUE LOVE OF SELF

I. There is a passage in the Gospel which might lead us to believe that we are forbidden to love ourselves. *Amen, amen, I say to you, Jesus declares, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting.*¹

These words command us to hate ourselves in this world if we wish to attain salvation in the next life. In what sense, however, does Christ mean that we are to hate ourselves? He certainly means that we should mortify our lower inclinations, deny our selfish ambitions, die to the world, and be prepared to lose life itself rather than offend God in any way. This is the kind of hate to which He urges us, a hatred of any perversion of our nature or of our faculties. If we prefer our own will to that of our Creator or love Him less than we love ourselves or, worse still, if we forget and ignore Him in favour of passing pleasures, then we invert the order of spiritual and moral values established by God and create a disorder which could lead us into sin.

Instead, we should love God above all things and subjugate our thoughts, desires, and affections to Him. We should be prepared to forget ourselves for His sake and even to sacrifice life itself for His honour and glory. Then our self-hatred will become a sublime love which will bring us victory in our battle against our sensual inclinations. It will give us peace and resignation in suffering, and at the hour of death will give us that consolation and joy which the martyrs experienced when they shed their blood for the sake of Jesus Christ.

2. St. Thomas writes that man genuinely loves himself when he directs all his activities towards God.² True self-love, then, consists in dedicating all our thoughts and actions to God, Who is our highest and only true good.

Anything which does not lead us to God is vain and useless. Anything which keeps us away from God separates us from our true good and therefore leads us towards everlasting spiritual ruin. We should love ourselves, then, by loving ourselves in God and for God. If we fail to do this, we hate rather than love ourselves, because we make folly, sin, and eternal damnation the objects of our lives. Christianity, we may now conclude, cannot be said to condemn self-love. It does not condemn it, but simply puts it right.

The Church has always been opposed to any form of Quietism or Puritanism which would advocate the pure and disinterested love of God to the extent of excluding any thought of our own happiness as the reward of our actions. As if it would be possible to love God when one had lost Him! On the contrary, if we love God in Himself and above all things, we love ourselves also, because only in loving God can we achieve our own perfect happiness. The pure love of God does not exclude self-love, but elevates and completes it.

3. Any other kind of self-love is not true love, but is a distorted affection which diverts us from the pursuit of our final end. Let us examine ourselves on this point. What is the object of our

thoughts, affections, and actions? Is it the glory of God and the triumph of His kingdom? If so, we can claim to love ourselves as we ought. Otherwise, our self-love is distorted and sinful.

¹ John 12, 24-25.

² S. Th., I-II, q. 100, a. 5 ad. 1.

5th December

THE CONTEMPLATIVE AND THE ACTIVE LIFE

1. We ought not to imagine that contemplation is a privilege exclusive to monks and nuns. In fact, it belongs to all Christians. It is the privilege of the peasant, artisan, or clerk, who on his way home from work pays a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "Here I am, my God," any one of them may say. "I am very tired. Please give me some rest for my soul. I am weary and worried both in body and in soul. I wish to love You more and to be faithful to You until I die. I wish to think only of You, but there are so many other things which I must think about. I have so many temptations and disturbances which cause me to forget You and which often lead me into evil. O God, be the light of my soul, the peace of my heart, the divine strength of my weak will. . . ." Mumuring words like these, they listen to God and seem to see Him bending down towards them.

Then there is the student who has spent the day poring over books, searching for the truth. He goes into the church for a moment and kneels down. His mind is full of the tumult of thoughts, calculations, and problems never completely answered or explained in the books written by men. He asks God for the light which he has not found, for the answer which he has not discovered, for the peace and calm which only He can give.

At least for a moment, all these workers and students are contemplatives. They have left behind the noise of the world in

order to listen to the voice of God. But this voice, which does not speak in words, but in silence and in peace, is the voice of contemplation. Prayer comes afterwards, when God makes His presence felt in the soul. In this way, no matter who or what we are, we should all be contemplatives. In other words, we should seek in quiet conversation with God the truth and tranquillity which the world cannot give us.

2. There have always been in the Church both contemplatives and active apostles, and there have always been people who combined both kinds of life. The contemplatives seek solitude, avoid contact with the external world, and preserve a constant intimacy with God. The men of action, on the other hand, fight for the glory of God and for the salvation of their neighbour. Finally, there are those who strive to unite both forms of spirituality in their work for God. The first group lead the life of Mary, the second that of Martha, while the third imitate both Mary and Martha.

It is this last group which St. Thomas prefers. It is better, he says, to enlighten than merely to shine; it is better to pass on to others the fruits of our contemplation than merely to contemplate.¹ If we understand and practise his teaching, we can achieve both our own sanctification and the welfare of our neighbour, and can combine the interior life with the external apostolate.

3. The man is heading for disaster who becomes obsessed with the necessity for external activity to the exclusion of the vital source of the apostolate, which is to be found in prayer and contemplation. He will sow much and will gather nothing. He will make a great deal of noise wherever he goes, but his work will not be blessed by God. Those who are overactive and think that they can conquer the whole world, says St. John of the Cross, would do well to remember that they would be more useful to the Church and more pleasing to God if they spent at least half their time with God in prayer.

Unless neighbourly love and external charity are inspired by

the love of God, they are a useless sham and are often no more than the outward expression of personal ambition. On the other hand, there is something lacking in prayer and contemplation if they fail to produce good works. Love cannot be idle and contemplation should not be mere daydreaming. If a man loves and contemplates God, he will love and contemplate his neighbour. Then he will feel the urge to dedicate himself, no matter what the sacrifice, to charitable activity on his neighbour's behalf.

¹ S. Th., II-II, q. 188, a. 6, 3.

6th December

KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

1. It may seem to some that learning is not sufficiently praised and encouraged in Sacred Scripture and in spiritual literature. *Let no one rate himself more than he ought*,¹ says St. Paul, and when he is writing to the Corinthians he warns them that *knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies*. He adds, moreover, that *if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know*.²

Similar warnings may be found in *The Imitation of Christ*. "What doth it profit thee to dispute deeply about the Trinity, if thou be wanting in humility, and so be displeasing to the Trinity? . . . I would rather feel compunction than know how to define it. If thou didst know the whole Bible outwardly, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it all profit thee without charity and the grace of God?"³ "A lowly rustic that serveth God is better than a proud philosopher who pondereth the courses of the stars, and neglecteth himself."⁴ "The humble knowledge of oneself is a surer way to God than deep researches after science. Knowledge is not to be blamed, nor simple

acquaintance with things, good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred. But because many take more pains to be learned than to lead good lives, therefore they often go astray, and bear no fruit at all, or but little.”⁵

Obviously, it is not knowledge itself which is condemned by Sacred Scripture and by the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, but the abuse of knowledge. Learning may be abused in two ways; firstly, when a man studies from motives of pride and vanity, and secondly, when a man uses his knowledge, as often happens today, for evil purposes. Like everything else in life, science should lead us towards God, not away from Him.

God has endowed each one of us with an intellect so that we may know the truth and investigate the mysteries of nature. This search for truth, however, should bring us nearer to God, Who is the Supreme Truth. The different branches of science are only rays which emanate from the Supreme Truth and which should lead us back to their source. It is not enough for us to be clever; above all, we must be good. Otherwise, knowledge will be a dangerous instrument in our possession, both dangerous to ourselves and to our fellow-men. The devil is far more intelligent than we are, yet he has lost God for ever.

2. What is the purpose of our studies and of our quest for knowledge? It is interesting to read what St. Bernard has to say on this subject. “There are those who wish to learn for learning’s sake; these are simply curious and come to no serious conclusions. There are those, moreover, who study in order to be better known; these are vain men. Others acquire knowledge in order to sell it and to make money or in order to gain honours; these are merchants of science and culture. There are others, however, who cultivate science as an instrument to be used in the service of their neighbour; such men are motivated by charity. There are also some who study in order to sanctify themselves; and this is true wisdom.”⁶

Our thirst for knowledge should spring from an ardent desire to know God better in the beauty of His creation and in the multiplicity of laws which govern it. Knowing Him better, we shall love Him more. We should be theocentric rather than egocentric in our learning, as in everything else. In other words, we should seek God rather than ourselves. It is in this highest sense that knowledge is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Rom. 12, 3.² 1 Cor. 8, 1-2.³ Bk. I, c. 1.⁴ Bk. 1, c. 2.⁵ Bk. 1, c. 3.⁶ Sermon. 35.

7th December

TRUE WISDOM

I. Cicero aptly defined wisdom as that knowledge of the human and of the divine which gives birth to the resolution to imitate the divine and to subordinate all human considerations to the practice of virtue.¹

According to Christian teaching both knowledge and wisdom, properly understood, are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Only the light and grace of the Holy Spirit can enable us to comprehend the truth, which in its plenitude is God Himself, and to appreciate the vanity of human things as long as they are not ordained to their final end, which is God and the everlasting life of happiness.

St. Thomas holds that human and earthly things are the proper object of science, in so far, however, as they ought to be directed towards God. "The man who has a correct approach to science regards creatures as ordained to God, does not value them for more than they are worth, and does not permit them to constitute the purpose of his life."² "All creatures are ordained to God and to His glory," he writes elsewhere, "in that they manifest the

divine goodness in themselves; they are, moreover, the means to everlasting happiness.”³

Nature may be said to be a sacrament which enables us to gain experience of God.⁴ This is how knowledge becomes wisdom, which is not content merely to have a proper estimation of human objects, but proceeds to penetrate with the assistance of Revelation and of grace into the transcendent mysteries of the Divinity. Wisdom, moreover, guides the will and the heart as well as the intellect. It is practical as well as speculative, for it directs our actions as well as our thoughts towards God. Like the Saints, we should be guided entirely by this true intellectual and practical wisdom. “Grant me, O Lord, celestial wisdom,” we should pray with the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, “that I may learn above all things to seek Thee and to find Thee; above all things to relish Thee and to love Thee, and to understand all other things as they are, according to the order of Thy wisdom.”⁵

2. Today, unfortunately, there is too much store set on material science considered in itself and apart from God. Many people do not regard earthly things as steps which enable them to climb towards God, but as objects desirable in themselves which possess the power to satisfy them both intellectually and sensibly. In fact, they fail to appease their vanity for very long and, if they become attached to them, lead them towards spiritual ruin.

A century ago the French writer, De Maistre, prophesied incalculable evil if men did not return to the ancient values and subordinate knowledge to goodness once more. Because of science, he said, men would become more barbarous than the barbarians. His words have come true in the past few decades. Unbridled science has brought us two world wars and the atom bomb which is now threatening to perpetrate the final destruction of the human race.

Let us seek to avert catastrophe in our own individual lives at least. Knowledge is desirable, but only after goodness and

humility. Let us remember the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: *All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*⁶

¹ Cicero, Tusc., IV, 26.

² S. Th., II-II, q. 9, a. 4.

³ Q. Q., d. d., De Caritate, q. I, a. 7.

⁴ S. Th., III, q. 60, a. 2 ad 1.

⁵ Bk. III, c. 27.

⁶ I Cor. 3, 22-23.

8th December

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

I. Let us read the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel in order to try and understand as far as possible the Immaculate Conception and the sublime holiness of Mary. *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, and the virgin's name was Mary. And when the angel had come to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women."*¹ The Blessed Virgin was troubled when she heard these words, but the Angel reassured her. He told her that she had found favour with God, and added that she would become the Mother of God, for the Word would become flesh in her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit in such a manner that in her nature the privileges of virginity and of the divine motherhood would be miraculously united. Mary then gave her assent to the will of God, and her 'fiat' placed her on a pedestal high above all the generations of humanity and all the choirs of the angelic kingdom.

It is on this passage of the Gospel that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady chiefly depends. She was full of grace, and the supremely beloved of God. How then could she have been subject to the rule of sin which we inherited from Adam? If her soul had been stained with sin at the first

moment of her conception, she would not have enjoyed the special favour of God and the plenitude of grace. She was, moreover, predestined to become the Mother of God. Was it possible that the divine Word, Who was to become her Son, could have permitted her soul to have been sullied even for a single instant by sin, which deprives us of grace and makes us enemies of God? It was on good grounds, therefore, that the Church defined that from the first moment of her conception Mary was free from all taint of sin, by a singular privilege conferred on her by God and through the merits of her divine Son, Jesus Christ.

2. By virtue of her Immaculate Conception the Blessed Virgin obtained four distinct privileges. (1) She was preserved free from the stain of original sin. (2) She never experienced the rebellion of the passions against the spirit. (3) She was confirmed in grace, so that, in the words of St. Augustine,² one could not mention sin and the name of Mary in one breath. (4) She was perfected in grace and enriched with all the supernatural gifts to a degree far higher than any of the Saints and than the Angels themselves.

Such is our Mother, Mary. We should rejoice with her, and we should have perfect confidence in her and have recourse to her in all our needs. Since her intercession is so powerful with God, she can obtain anything from Him. Above all, she is able and eager to obtain for us that which is most necessary and most important, namely, the avoidance of sin and absolute fidelity to God's grace in the execution of our duties.

3. Let us remember that Mary was not only preserved free from sin and endowed with every supernatural gift, but she never in her whole life committed the slightest fault and she advanced daily in holiness. It is true that we do not possess the privileges accorded to Mary, but we have nevertheless received many favours from God and continue daily to receive them.

Let us promise, therefore, that we shall not be unworthy children of so great a Mother. Let us promise to remain free from the slightest taint of sin in order to please God and her.

Let us promise, finally, to make daily progress towards that level of sanctity which God requires of us in the particular state in which He has placed us.

¹ Luke I, 26-28.

² De natura et gratia, c. 36.

9th December

THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE SACRAMENTS

1. Let us go back in imagination to the day when we were baptised. That was the day of our spiritual rebirth, when we were cleansed from original sin and enriched by the gift of grace, which is the life of the soul. On this solemn occasion we promised through the agency of our godparents to remain faithful to the trust which we had received and to renounce Satan and whatever else might have power to extinguish our supernatural life and to plunge us into sin.

Have we kept these promises which were made on our behalf and which we repeated from time to time before the altar as we grew older? Every gift of God demands our gratitude and co-operation. It is our own grave loss if we remain cold and indifferent in spite of the precious favours which we receive from God. God is infinitely good and merciful, but precisely because of this He demands generous co-operation on our part. If we abuse His graces, He will leave us to our own devices. We shall no longer be aware of His inspirations and His appeals to us to advance in virtue. What is to happen to us then? We shall be like an arid plain on which only weeds and thorns can grow. Our lives will be meaningless and purposeless, for God and everlasting happiness are the only goals worthy of our pursuit.

2. In His great love and mercy Jesus Christ has given us all the other Sacraments as well as Baptism. This long chain of

spiritual favours links the stages of our progress from the cradle to the grave, sustaining and sanctifying us on the way. Although His goodness is infinite, God could not do any more for us. He has endowed us through the Sacrament of Baptism with supernatural life; He has given us the light and strength of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation; He has granted us forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance, power over His Real and His Mystical Body in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and a reflection of divine love in the Sacrament of Matrimony. At the close of our lives He will heal the scars of sin and comfort our weary hearts by means of Extreme Unction. But He has also bestowed on us a gift infinitely greater than all these, for He has given us Himself in the Blessed Eucharist.

How can we remain cold and indifferent in the presence of so much goodness and generosity? We have all the means necessary for salvation. It will be disastrous for us if we fail to cherish them and if we neglect to repay such great love with all the love of our poor hearts and with a determined effort to be good and holy.

3. The man who abuses God's gifts calls down a curse on his own head. *Cursed be he*, said the prophet Jeremias, *that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully.*¹

Many people neglect to make proper use of Confession and Holy Communion. Let us examine ourselves with special care in this regard. Do we go to Confession at least once a fortnight or, if possible, every week? How terrible for us if we are content to remain heedlessly in the state of sin while we have at hand such an easy opportunity of obtaining pardon! Furthermore, do we endeavour to receive Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist every day, or at least as often as possible? We have daily need of this divine nourishment if we wish to preserve the life of the soul. Otherwise we shall languish and grow faint, and shall eventually fall into sin. Finally, let us consider whether we receive these Sacraments with the proper disposition, with due preparation,

and with sufficient gratitude. These are wonderful gifts which God has given us. We should receive them with faith, with recollection, and with love.

¹ Jer. 48, 10.

10th December

PEACE OF SOUL

1. Peace of soul is more to be desired than anything else in this world. Wealth, honours, and pleasures are valueless as long as we are discontented and disturbed at heart. Happiness is essentially internal, not external. Anyone who looks for it outside himself cannot find it simply because it does not exist there. Interior peace, however, is capable of bringing us whatever happiness can be obtained in this world.

We can have this peace if we avoid sin. The Holy Spirit assures us that *there is no peace to the wicked*.¹ Our tranquillity will be increased by humility and gentleness. A haughty and ambitious man can never be at peace. *Come to me*, Jesus invites us, *all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls*.²

The only way, then, by which we can acquire peace of soul is by avoiding sin, practising humility, and obeying the law of God. The Saints possessed this serenity, even in times of trial and of suffering, because they lived in God and were perfectly faithful to His law.

2. True peace consists in doing the will of God constantly and with love. When God gives us consolation and joy, we thank Him for His infinite goodness towards us. When He sends us suffering and privation, we bless and thank Him nonetheless. Let us recall the example of Job. When he had lost his children, his health, and all his possessions, and was derided by his wife and distrusted by his friends, he exclaimed in a spirit of resig-

nation: *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!*³

All this may seem too difficult to us, but it is only on these conditions that we can obtain interior peace. By surrendering our will entirely to God in all the circumstances of our lives, we can raise ourselves above all the sorrows and vain desires of this earthly existence, and we can find in God a lasting peace and tranquillity.

3. After expounding this doctrine of interior peace, *The Imitation of Christ* goes on to say: "But never to feel any grief at all, nor to suffer any trouble of heart or body, is not the state of this present life, but of everlasting rest. Think not, therefore, that thou hast found true peace, if thou feel no burden; nor that then all is well, if thou have no adversary; nor that thou hast attained to perfection, if all things be done according to thy inclination. Neither do thou conceive a great notion of thyself, or imagine thyself to be especially beloved, if thou experience great devotion and sweetness, for it is not in such things as these that a true lover of virtue is known; nor doth the progress and perfection of a man consist in these things."⁴

We can see from this that peace of soul in this life is always the product of strife and sacrifice. We must pay the price if we desire to acquire it. Only when we have attained at last to everlasting happiness shall we enjoy perfect peace as the reward of our perseverance and fidelity on earth.

¹ Is. 48, 22.

² Mt. 11, 28-29.

³ Job 1, 21.

⁴ Bk. III, c. 25.

I Ith December

THE WORD OF GOD

I. The supernatural power of the Word of God derives from God Himself, not from the particular person who utters it.

Remember what Jesus Christ said to His Apostles when He told them to convert the world to faith and holiness. *Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.*¹

The salvation of the world must come from the preaching of the Apostles and their successors, but only because their preaching contains the word of God Himself. There have been many philosophers throughout the centuries who taught their own particular doctrines with great eloquence and persuasiveness. Their teaching did little to make men better, however. Perhaps men did not listen to them, or perhaps they heeded them for a while and soon forgot them. That is always the fate of human achievement. After the initial noise and flourish comes silence and oblivion. But the word of God remains for ever. *The word of the Lord endures for ever.*² The light of the Gospel never fades, because it is a light which comes from God. The goodness which emanates from its inspired pages will move and transform human hearts until the end of time.

2. We should hold the word of God in reverence and listen attentively to it. *He who hears you, hears me, Jesus told His Apostles, and he who rejects you, rejects me.*³ The man who preaches the word of God may be imperfect and ill-trained, but we should not judge his message by his personal qualities and oratorical ability. We should focus our attention on the word of God and treasure that. God often employs weak and imperfect instruments, and even unworthy ones, in order to accomplish His work, so that we may hear His word with humility and seek Him rather than men. If we seek men, we shall find men; but if we seek God, we shall find God and His eternal truth and goodness.

We should listen humbly to God's word and should remember that we have great need of it. Even if we are well instructed and feel that we are more learned than the preacher, it is still necessary

for us to be attentive to the living word of God so that it may transform us and make us holy.

3. It is especially important for us to acquire the dispositions necessary to enable us to listen attentively to the word of God and to put it into practice in our lives. We are all acquainted with the parable of the sower. The seed, of course, represents the word of God. Some of the seed fell by the wayside and was trampled into the earth or carried away by the birds. Some fell on rocky ground and because of the lack of moisture it withered away. Some fell among thorns, which choked it and prevented it from springing up. Finally, the rest of the seed fell on good ground and yielded fruit more or less abundantly.⁴

How do we receive the word of God? Perhaps we are constantly dissipated and distracted? In that case the divine seed will not bear fruit, but will be trampled down or will wither away. It may be, however, that we hear the word of God with pleasure and joy until our first enthusiasm is strangled by our fondness for money, ease and earthly pleasures, which prevents us from laying up merit for everlasting life.

Let us remember that the word of God is a very precious gift, which ought not to be neglected or abused. Our eternal salvation depends on the manner in which we receive it.

¹ Mk. 16, 15-16.

² Peter 1, 25.

³ Luke 10, 16.

⁴ Mt. 13, 3-8.

12th December

LEAVING OUR WORRIES IN GOD'S HANDS

1. Although we ought to be busy, we should never be too preoccupied. We should do what we can and leave the rest to Providence. Preoccupation is unprofitable and even harmful, for

it produces worry and anxiety. Very often, it impedes our work because it destroys our peace of mind. We should do everything of which we are capable, therefore, and leave the rest for God to do if He believes that it is for our spiritual benefit. If He does not consider that it would be to our advantage, He will leave it undone and we shall be the gainers thereby.

Preoccupation springs from lack of faith and lack of resignation to the will of God. One is reminded in this context of a story which is told about St. John Bosco. He was waiting one day for an audience with a Minister of State with whom he would have to discuss various difficult problems. There were a good many other people in the waiting-room, most of whom walked up and down agitatedly as they pondered over what they intended to say to the Minister and what they hoped to receive from him. Don Bosco, however, remained calm; so calm, in fact, that because he was also very tired, he fell asleep. At last the Minister appeared in the doorway and to his amusement discovered the priest slumbering contentedly. Don Bosco awoke when the Minister called him and calmly proceeded to explain at once what it was that he desired. He spoke in the manner of one accustomed to conversing with God, and he obtained without any trouble everything which he wanted.

2. We should try and behave with similar serenity. We should stay close to God and live in complete conformity with His will. We should perform our duties attentively and whole-heartedly, but we should never worry about them. As a result, we shall do more and do it more effectively. Most important of all, we shall be sure that God will bless our work.

3. In times of difficulty and of trial, let us remember the advice of the Holy Spirit. *Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will support you; never will he permit the just man to be disturbed.*¹ Let us meditate also on the words which *The Imitation of Christ* places on God's lips. "Son, suffer me to do with thee what I will; I

know what is expedient for thee. Thou thinkest as man; thou judgest in many things as human affection suggesteth." Let us reply then in the words of the disciple. "Lord, what Thou sayest is true. Greater is Thy care for me than all the care I can take of myself . . . Lord, provided that my will remain true and firm towards Thee, do with me whatsoever it shall please Thee. For it cannot but be good, whatever Thou shalt do with me. If Thou wilt have me to be in darkness, be Thou blessed; and if Thou wilt have me to be in light, be Thou again blessed; if Thou vouchsafe to comfort me, be Thou blessed; and if it be Thy will I should be afflicted, be Thou still equally blessed."²

If we can achieve such a tranquil spirit of acceptance of the divine will, we shall never be agitated or preoccupied. We shall always be at peace both in joy and in sorrow, even as the Martyrs and the Saints were. Let us ask God for the grace to be able to live and die in harmony with His holy desires.

¹ Ps. 54, 23.

² Bk. III, c. 17.

13th December

MERIT AND THE LOVE OF GOD

I. The more we know, writes St. Catherine of Siena, the more we love, and the more we love, the more we receive. Our merit, she concludes, increases in accordance with the measure of our love.¹ We tend to judge men on the strength of their achievements, and to judge ourselves according to the degree of success which we have attained. Our standards could hardly be more false. "How much soever each one is in Thy eyes," the author of *The Imitation of Christ* cries out to God in the words of St. Francis, "so much is he and no more."²

It is not success which counts with God, and still less human esteem. What matters with God is our intention of pleasing Him and of working for His glory from the motive of pure love. If we are successful in our work, let us praise God. If we are unsuccessful, let us thank Him just the same. Our merit is commensurate with our love for God. If we love Him very much, we shall work hard and make sacrifices for His sake. We must work to satisfy God alone, however, and not for ourselves. If we work for any other purpose all our labour is wasted. We sow abundantly and reap little or nothing. God alone matters. If we work only for Him, we shall be blessed by Him and shall reap the fruits of everlasting life.

2. It is necessary, therefore, to love God and to do everything for love of Him and for His glory. If we are to love God, however, we must know Him. If only we knew God perfectly, not only should we love Him, but we should come near to expiring from excessive love. We love God too little because we know Him too little. Let us endeavour, therefore, to know Him by meditating on His infinite goodness, beauty, and perfection. Any other goodness, beauty or perfection is a faint reflection of that of God Who is the source of all true goodness. We should not allow ourselves to be distracted or disturbed by these fleeting and perishable reflections.

God alone is enough for us. Let us learn to know Him and, in consequence, to love Him in the splendour of created things, which reflect His beauty and power. The stars and the flowers, the waves of the sea and the trees of the forest, all speak to us of God. Let us come to know and to love Him, until we lament with St. Augustine: Too late have I loved You!

3. The more we know and love God, the more we receive from Him. If we love Him sincerely, He will shower down His graces on us. We have such grave need of these favours in order to be able to resist temptation, to avoid sin, and to advance in holiness. Let us think of God often, therefore, in order to deepen

our awareness of His presence and to fan the flame of our love for Him. Then we shall live in intimacy with Him and shall receive from Him all the graces which we need.

¹ Dial., c. 131.

² Bk. III, c. 50.

14th December

THE DESIRE FOR PERFECTION

1. *Make and keep yourselves holy*, God commands us, *because I am holy*.¹ *You are to be perfect*, adds Jesus Christ, *even as your heavenly Father is perfect*.²

We are obliged, therefore, to make every possible effort to advance in holiness. Sad experience teaches us, however, that it is very difficult to reach the level of sanctity to which we are called by God, and that it is impossible to achieve absolute perfection, which God alone possesses. Why, then, does God place before us such an inaccessible goal? Simply because, although He knows that we cannot attain the perfect holiness which is to be found in our heavenly Father, He wants us to desire it with all our hearts and to do our best to approach as near to it as we can.

This desire for sanctity should dominate all our actions. It may be impossible for us completely to achieve Christian perfection, but we should always strive towards it. All our actions and affections should form a ladder which will enable us to climb nearer to this ideal. If the desire for perfection dominates our entire lives, it will one day dominate and brighten the supreme moment of death. If we lack this desire, we shall fall into a state of tepidity and of indifference to spiritual realities which will inevitably end in sin.

2. The Son of God ardently desired our welfare and happiness.

It was for this that He became man, preached His doctrine, gave us the Sacraments, and suffered and died on the Cross. *I have greatly desired*, He said on the eve of His passion, *to eat this passover with you.*³ He desired this because He wished to leave us Himself really present in the Blessed Eucharist as nourishment for our souls.

The entire life of Jesus Christ was a yearning for our everlasting salvation. Can we remain cold and unmoved in the presence of such infinite goodness? Surely we cannot. Our lives also should be a continual and ardent yearning for perfection, inspired by gratitude as well as by an appreciation of our own true interests.

3. There are two kinds of desire. (1) There is passive desire, such as that of St. Augustine when he kept repeating that he wished to be converted on the morrow. Hell is full of people who desired exactly that. (2) There is also efficacious desire, which is that of the man who intends to employ the necessary means of putting his resolution into practice. This is the kind of desire by which we should be animated. It may be that we shall encounter many falls and obstacles before we can carry out our resolutions, but the important thing is not to lose heart. We must keep going forward with the help of God and, at least at the hour of death, our efforts will be crowned with success.

¹ Lev. 11, 44; 19, 2.

² Mt. 5, 48.

³ Luke 22, 15.

15th December

CONSOLATIONS FROM GOD

I. Even men and other creatures have some power to comfort and console us. The comfort which we receive from them, however, cannot completely satisfy our hearts, which were made for

God. Such consolations as they can give are short-lived and vanish like snow beneath the sun.

What can men or other worldly creatures give us? They can give us material wealth, but this often turns out to be troublesome and vexatious and is too much inferior to the greatness of the human soul to be able to satisfy it. Worldly honours can intoxicate our pride and self-conceit for a little while, but this state of inebriation cannot last very long. We know too well that we are what we are in the sight of God, and nothing more. The praise and flattery of other men adds nothing to our stature and only serves as an incentive to idle vanity. Then there are worldly pleasures, some of which are healthy and commendable; but how long do they last? They are like flowers which open their petals to the morning air and fold them again in the evening. There are unhealthy pleasures, too; not only are these passing and perishable like all created things, but they leave behind a sense of nausea and remorse.

Let us seek before all other joys the consolations of God. These do not decrease as life goes on, but last for ever and are completed in the next life.

2. "Whatsoever I can desire or imagine for my comfort," says *The Imitation of Christ*, "I look not for here, but hereafter. For if I alone should have all the comfort of this world, and might enjoy all its delights, certain it is they could not last long. Wherefore thou canst not, O my soul, be fully confident nor perfectly refreshed, except in God, the comforter of the poor and the receiver of the humble. Wait a little while, my soul, wait for the divine promise, and thou wilt have abundance of all good things in heaven. If thou desirest too inordinately these present things, thou wilt lose those that are heavenly and eternal. Use temporal things, but desire eternal. Thou canst not be satisfied with any temporal goods, because thou wast not created for their enjoyment. Although thou shouldst have all created goods, thou couldst not be happy and blessed; but in God who

created all things, consists all thy beatitude and happiness. Not such as is seen or cried up by the foolish lovers of the world, but such as the good faithful of Christ await, and of which they that are spiritual and clean of heart, whose conversation is in heaven, have sometimes a foretaste."¹

3. We must, therefore, seek in God all true comfort and consolation, because all other comforts and consolations are insignificant and unenduring. We should remember, however, that even heavenly consolations may sometimes decrease or disappear. At times God is silent and withdraws the sweetness of His consolations. These are trials which we can often surmount by patience and resignation. This kind of spiritual aridity afflicted for a long time holy souls like St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. If God sends us these trials also, let us accept them willingly, for He merely wishes to test our love and our fidelity. We must be brave. Peace of mind will soon return and then we shall hear God's voice and enjoy His heavenly consolations once more.

¹ Bk. III, c. 16.

16th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

I. *The Cave of Bethlehem*

I. Why, asked Bossuet, should the Eternal Word of God, infinitely and everlastingly happy, have deigned to assume in time the fallen state of humanity? Why should He have chosen as the scene of His miraculous life of love this insignificant world a planet almost imperceptible among the myriads of gigantic heavenly bodies? It was for the very same reason, Bossuet replied, that prompted Him, once He had become man, to choose as

His birthplace the tiny and unknown village of Nazareth in Galilee rather than Rome, the centre of power, or Athens, the centre of learning, or Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel. Our world is the Nazareth of creation, one of the smallest planets in the firmament.

God did not even choose, moreover, to be born in the poor but comparatively comfortable house at Nazareth. He preferred to be born in the strange town of Bethlehem. It was the cradle of His ancestral line, but it gave Him no welcome and compelled Him to be born in a cold and squalid barn on the straw of a manger. God had no heed of human grandeur. His power and majesty shone more brightly through the insignificance of the objects and means which He employed in order to fulfil His purpose. It would be ridiculous to imagine even for a moment that He had any need of human aid in order to accomplish His designs. God chooses the weak things of the world in order to confound the strong.¹

2. Jesus had another reason for electing to be born in the wretched cave at Bethlehem. He desired to begin His earthly life with a striking lesson in humility. Since this virtue is the basis of the spiritual life, it was the first which He wished to teach us. He taught it in deed from the very beginning, long before He taught it in word when He said: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*² Not only did He, the omnipotent and infinite God, become a little child, but He was born in such poverty that He had not even a house in which to shelter nor a cradle in which to lie. This should be an eloquent lesson for us who are always thinking of our own comfort and of worldly appearances. Let us go in spirit to the stable in Bethlehem and bow before this mystery of love. Let us promise Jesus to return His love as ardently and as sincerely as we are able.

3. The main resolution which we should make at the foot of the manger is one of humility. We should be humble in mind because we should remember that we are nothing without God

and that everything which we have comes from Him. In fact, we are less than nothing, for our physical and spiritual gifts have been given to us by God, whereas our sins belong entirely to ourselves. We should also be humble of heart. We should be innocent and simple like children, as the Gospel commands, trusting and loving so that we may be worthy of God's favours and consolations. Unless we acquire the innocence and humility of spiritual childhood, we cannot be pleasing to God.

¹ Missale Romanum, Miss. Virg. et Mart.

² Mt. 11, 29.

17th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

II. *Preparation for the Nativity*

I. The Birth of Our Lord is the most wonderful and most moving mystery of divine omnipotence and goodness. At first thought the idea of the infinite God becoming man would seem impossible. Between God and man there is a vast abyss. Why should God have bridged this gap and assumed our poor mortal nature, becoming like us in everything but sin while still remaining God? It is a hard question for the human mind to answer. There is only one reply, however. The immensity of God's power and justice is equalled by the immensity of His love. It was simply because God loved us infinitely that He took pity on us, lost as we were in sin. He assumed a human body and became man, and He suffered and died for us so that we might love and obey Him more easily and follow in the way of goodness.

To our poor intellects God seems not only immense and infinite, but also very remote. For this reason God determined

to come closer to us, so close that He became as one of us. He was a tiny infant crying in a manger; then He was a lovable young boy Who spoke words of eternal wisdom among the doctors in the Temple; then He was a prophet Who traversed the countryside of Palestine, teaching and working miracles; finally, He died a martyr's death on the Cross in the cause of truth and goodness. Reflecting on this mystery of infinite love, let us adore and love Him.

2. The better to celebrate this mystery of the Word of God made man for love of us, it is necessary to make some preparation. Then we shall be able to derive real spiritual benefit from the feast of the Nativity.

We can prepare our minds for the celebration of this great mystery by meditating on the infinite goodness of God, Who was so moved by compassion for our misery that He came down from Heaven and became an infant whimpering on a bed of straw in a manger. He offered His first sufferings for our sakes even as He later offered Himself on the Cross as a victim for our redemption. This meditation should elicit from us an act of profound humility. If God so abased Himself, how can such sinful and ungrateful creatures as we are carry ourselves proudly and boastfully in the presence of God and of men?

This humble act of adoration on the part of our intellect should be accompanied by an act of heartfelt love. If we do not love Jesus, whom else are we capable of loving? He alone is worthy of all our affection; only He can satisfy the desires of our heart.

3. Our preparation, finally, should also embrace the will. In other words, we should make good resolutions during our Christmas Novena. We should resolve to be more fervent in prayer, to be more mortified, and to make greater efforts to practise virtue. Every day, and if possible every hour, let us think of and invoke the Divine Child. Let us ask Him to help us to model our lives on His, so that they may be full of humility, of love for God and for our fellow-men, of perfect resignation

in suffering, and of voluntary mortification and penance designed to prove our love for Jesus and to expiate our sins.

18th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

III. *The First Hours of the Childhood of Jesus Christ*

I. Enter in spirit into the stable at Bethlehem and humbly kneel before the Word of God made man. What do we find Jesus doing in these first moments of His mortal life? By a single act of His divine will He could have instantly transformed the human race. But He came to redeem men and preached to them before anything else the virtues which they most needed—humility, indifference to worldly possessions, and the acceptance of suffering. He taught them to endure suffering, neither rebelliously nor even as a disagreeable necessity, but as a means of purification and sanctification. Before the time of Jesus Christ suffering was dreaded and abhorred. He taught us to love it because it is the salt of the earth which saves us from corruption, because it detaches us from worldly things, and because it lifts our thoughts towards Heaven.

What, then, do we find Jesus doing in these first moments of His mortal life? He is weeping and smiling by turns, as a newborn infant does. How can we understand the mystery behind these divine tears? Jesus does not weep because it is cold and damp, nor because He is uncomfortable on His bed of straw. He could have remedied these inconveniences, if He had so desired, by a single act of His will. No, He weeps for us, for the human race immersed in sin. He weeps and suffers so that we also may learn to weep and suffer for our sins and to do penance for them. This is the explanation of the tears of the Divine Child.

Let us learn to weep with Him, and we shall be purified and comforted.

2. Through life's long journey we have often had occasion to shed tears. We have wept for sheer physical pain or moral suffering. Sometimes, perhaps, we have wept for joy, for such joy as the world can give. On other occasions jealousy, hatred, or caprice may have moved us to tears. But have we ever wept, like Mary Magdalen or St. Augustine, for the sins which we have committed?

If the Infant Jesus wept for our sins, why should not we weep tears of repentance for them? If the tears which we shed for weak, human reasons are not inspired in any way by sentiments of faith, love or reparation, they fail to relieve our anguish or to gain everlasting merit for us.

3. When we contemplate the mystery of love which caused God made man to weep for our sins, we may not be moved to shed actual tears. But we should at least shed spiritual tears of repentance and of love, and of longing for holiness and for complete dedication to Jesus Christ. We should love Jesus for the countless numbers who do not love Him, or who blaspheme and ignore Him. We should yearn to make reparation for so much ingratitude and neglect by our prayers and penances. The infinite love of the God-Child demands all our love in return.

19th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

IV. *The Cradle of the Infant Jesus*

I. Enter once more with faith and love into the stable of Bethlehem. As soon as her Son has been miraculously delivered

without any damage to her virginity, Mary adores Him and, with such maternal love as we could never conceive of, she takes Him to her heart. Joseph, kneeling in ecstasy at the sight, bows reverently and kisses the forehead of the Divine Infant. In this moment of bliss he is well rewarded for his unshaken faith and for all the sacrifices which he has made from his youth until the time of his alliance with Mary.

Now Mary and Joseph look around and, since they can find no better cradle for the Baby Jesus, they place Him upon some straw in a manger, and cover Him with a rough linen cloth. They have nothing else to give the Son of God, King of Kings, and Lord of the Universe, Who wishes at this early stage to present us with this wonderful example of humility and voluntary poverty. But each of them has one treasure to offer, for they offer and dedicate their hearts to Jesus. Mary's heart is only less beautiful and pure than that of our divine Redeemer, and St. Joseph's is similar to hers.

Jesus did not come to look for human wealth or greatness, but He came in search of men's hearts so that He might make them holy. Throughout the centuries there have been many generous-hearted people who joined with Mary and Joseph in loving Jesus and in dedicating themselves entirely to Him. Does your heart belong completely to Jesus?

2. Perhaps I still preserve a strong attachment to sin and fall badly from time to time. What is the main motive power in my life? Perhaps I am motivated by self-interest and am attracted by pleasure, ease, and worldly glory. How little I have learned from the example of Our Lord in the manger.

Let us remember that the man who looks only for worldly success cannot find Heaven. He will wind up bitter and disillusioned, whereas the man who seeks Jesus Christ will eventually enjoy the peace and happiness which God alone can give.

3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, said Jesus Christ, for theirs is the*

*kingdom of heaven.*¹ Before He spoke these words, however, He had taught us the same thing in deed.

In the utter poverty of the stable in Bethlehem He tells us that riches, honours, and human grandeur cannot make us happy. We are entitled to accept these things if Providence bestows them on us, but we should not become attached to them. The human heart longs for God. It was not made for the transient pleasures and goods of this life, but only for God. In the presence of the Crib, therefore, let us learn to surrender ourselves heart and soul to Jesus Christ.

¹ Mt. 5, 3.

20th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

v. *The Swaddling Clothes of the Divine Infant*

I. It is believed that Mary, like other mothers in those days, wrapped the Infant Jesus in swaddling clothes. The Divine Child quietly offered this new humiliation to His heavenly Father. He saw prefigured in these bands the ropes with which He would be bound in the garden of Gethsemane, even after He had given sinful humanity His celestial teaching, example and miracles, and finally His own Body in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He saw in them, too, the chains with which He would be secured to the pillar in order to be scourged in the Praetorium of Pilate among the jeers and insults of the onlookers. He saw in them, finally, the cords with which, after having been condemned to the ignominious death of the Cross, He would be tied while being led to the place of execution on Mount Calvary. Filled

with infinite love for stricken humanity, the Heart of the Divine Infant offered all this in advance to His Father in Heaven.

Are we making any effort to return such great love? Like Jesus, we are often obliged to endure both physical and moral anguish. Have we the resignation to offer it all to Jesus, or do we squander our opportunities in useless complaining or in acts of impatience and rebellion? We shall have to go on suffering anyway, but in the latter case we may have to suffer even more and shall lose all merit in the sight of God.

Let us kneel down before the Holy Infant wrapped in His swaddling clothes, and let us promise to endure everything for His sake and in reparation for our sins.

2. The swaddling clothes of the Infant Jesus are, moreover, a symbol of the love which should bind us to Him. If we are not capable of loving Jesus, are we capable of love at all? Perhaps we love wealth, honour and pleasure? Some day, however, we shall have to leave all our wealth behind. Worldly honour and glory are also fleeting and can never satisfy us, while earthly pleasures leave behind a sense of emptiness and disgust. Jesus Christ alone can satisfy our hearts, for He alone has words of everlasting life. *Lord, let us say with St. Peter, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life.*¹

3. The swaddling clothes of the Infant Jesus are, finally, symbolic of the bonds of love which should unite us to our neighbour. Let us always remember that we shall never love God sincerely as long as we do not love our neighbour. *This is my commandment, Jesus said, that you love one another as I have loved you.*² This means that we must love our neighbour not only in word but in deed. We must make sacrifices on his behalf and must even be prepared to die for him.

In practice, how do we love our fellow-men? Are we prepared to spend time, money and energy in order to alleviate the material and spiritual afflictions which beset so many of our

brothers? If we refuse to do so, our piety is hard and false and is an insult to Almighty God.

¹ John 6, 69.

² John 15, 12.

21st December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

VI. *The Silence of the Divine Infant*

I. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Word of God made man, the infinite and substantial image of the Divine Intellect. Nevertheless, the Divine Infant whom we adore in the stable at Bethlehem is mute and silent. The voluntary humiliation of the Son of God is such that He, the Word of God, cannot utter a single human syllable. By this chosen silence, however, He teaches us many things. In the first place, He teaches us humility and self-denial. He teaches us, moreover, to recollect ourselves in the presence of God, so that it may be easier for us to speak with Him, and for Him to make known what He requires of us. The silence of prayer brings forth divine consolations and inspirations to holiness.

Do we love to be silent? It is not necessary to become hermits, but it is essential from time to time to place ourselves quietly in the presence of God. God cannot make Himself heard through the noise and confusion of the world, whereas He speaks clearly to the soul, which seeks the silence of prayer. In any case, if we go about looking for the gossip and idle chatter of the world, it is almost impossible not to offend God. *Avoid profane and empty babblings*, St. Paul urges us, *for they contribute much to ungodliness.*¹ *If anyone does not offend in word*, adds St. James, *he is a perfect man.*² *The tongue is a little member*, he continues, but goes on to emphasise that it is capable of doing either a great

deal of good or a great deal of harm. *With it we bless God the Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. These things, my brethren, ought not to be so.*³

There are two main lessons which we should learn, therefore, from the silence of the Divine Infant. We should learn to love recollection, and we should learn to make proper use of the gift of speech, which can be an equally powerful weapon in the cause of good or in the cause of evil.

2. Evil always attracts a great deal of attention, whereas goodness operates in silence. The reason why evil creates such a stir is that it is the work of pride and of ambition. It wants to be seen and to be applauded. Good work, however, is done for God. It does not seek the world's applause, but only the approval of God. When an enterprise sets out to look for publicity, there is reason to fear that it does not come from God but is prompted by human motives. As a result, it will prove sterile.

If we sincerely desire to please God, we shall work in silence. We shall not aim at our own worldly interests, but shall seek our own spiritual good and that of our fellow-men. If it is God's will that our good work may shine also before men, let us remember that this is for the glory of God and in order to give good example to our neighbour.

3. Let us kneel in spirit before the Holy Infant. He is silent, but His heart beats with love for His heavenly Father and for the afflicted human race which He has come to redeem. Let us adore God in the Mystery of His silence, and let us ask Him to favour us with His inspirations and graces. Let us ask Him to teach us to be like Him so that our hearts may be closed to the vain attractions of the world and open to the influence of the supernatural. Let us ask Him to help us to employ the gift of speech in order to adore, praise and thank God, and to draw down His blessings on ourselves and on our fellow-men. May the words which we utter exercise a prayerful and fruitful

apostolate, for it was chiefly for this purpose that God endowed us with the gift of speech.

¹ 2 Tim. 2, 16.

² James 3, 2.

³ James 3, 5-10.

22nd December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

VII. *Prayer and Dedication*

1. Let us kneel once more before the crib. Like other newborn infants, Jesus is sometimes asleep and sometimes awake, sometimes crying and sometimes smiling. Often His tiny eyes silently watch Mary and Joseph. Surely this seems a useless existence for Almighty God? But we know that it is not purposeless. This is the first great lesson which God wishes to give to the proud and corrupt human race. It is the lesson of humility, prayer and total dedication to God.

To outward appearances Jesus is behaving like any other baby. Internally, however, His soul is hypostatically united to the Eternal Word and dwells in the presence of the heavenly Father, Whom He loves with a burning and infinite love. Heart and soul, He offers Himself as a holocaust on behalf of sinful humanity and implores His heavenly Father to enlighten minds darkened by error, to strengthen weak human wills, and to make all men holy. It may well be said that already, in the silence and obscurity of the cradle, Jesus has begun to redeem the world, for every one of His human-divine actions has an infinite value. Whether He is awake or asleep, crying or smiling, He offers Himself silently to His Eternal Father as a holocaust of propitiation for our sins.

Let us adore the Divine Infant, therefore, and thank Him for the priceless gift of our Redemption, which is already accomplished in the silence and obscurity of the manger. Let us implore the grace to love Him and to imitate Him more closely.

2. Men are normally judged by their actions and by the degree

of external success which they have achieved. God, however, judges them by their intentions and by their internal dispositions. It is futile, and may even be dangerous, to accomplish great things and to attract the attention and applause of men unless we have first of all learned the lesson which the Infant Jesus teaches us in the manger. In other words, we must be humble and must seek God rather than ourselves in all our thoughts, desires, and actions. If our actions are to be genuinely pleasing to God, however, they must originate in an interior life of dedication to God and of complete harmony with His will. If this is lacking, everything is lacking. Without this interior life of grace and love we are *as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*,¹ and our actions are valueless in the sight of God.

3. As we kneel before the Infant Jesus, let us beseech Him to enable us to grasp the truth of these reflections. Let us take more care of our soul than we do of our external talents and possessions. May God occupy the foremost place in our minds and may He be the principal object of our thoughts, desires, and affections. Let us imitate the humble recollection and ardent love for God of the Holy Infant. Like Him, let us offer ourselves entirely to God. Let us ask Him to make us like Him in complete acceptance of the divine will, especially when we are in trouble or in pain, for in this way we shall be able to show God how sincerely we love Him.

¹ Cor. 13, 1.

23rd December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

VIII. *What Jesus Wants From Us*

1. Let us contemplate Jesus lying on a rough pallet of straw in the manger. When we see Him looking at us, let us ask ourselves what it is that He requires of us. In fact, He wants many

things from us. First of all, He wants us to weep for our sins and to promise never to fall again as long as we have the assistance of His grace, for which we should pray continually. For this He has become man and has entered into the world. For this He will work miracles, preach His doctrine, and shed His Precious Blood on the Cross. All this He will do to redeem us from sin and to win Heaven for us.

If we return to the path of sin, we destroy the divine work of redemption in as far as it applies to ourselves. We make Christ's passion, death and resurrection useless in our case. We brush aside the chain of favours with which His love has girdled us—the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the Church, our good mother who is always at our side to instruct and direct us, to rescue us from peril, and to distribute to us the gifts of her divine Founder. When we sin, we commit an act of base ingratitude to Jesus and accomplish our own eternal ruin.

The Infant Jesus longs for us to give our hearts to Him. Since He has given us His own, why should we be unwilling to give ours to Him? Who or what can we love if we do not love Jesus? Nothing else is capable of giving us peace of soul and resignation in suffering. Jesus alone can bestow these gifts on us as long as we love and follow Him and abandon ourselves completely to His holy will.

2. *Unless you turn and become like little children*, the Infant Jesus says to us, *you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*¹ He wishes us to be humble, simple, and innocent like children. As we grow older, unfortunately, many of us become proud, complicated, and vain. We lose the straightforward candour of childhood. Worldly pretentiousness cannot possibly appeal to Jesus since He, Who is truly great, chose to become a tiny Infant. He wishes us to renounce the self-important airs and the intricate methods which we employ in order to conceal the truth, to disguise our lack of virtue, and to assume the appearances of learning and of authority, regardless of the fact that the highest achievement

of which we are capable is to be humble, the most necessary knowledge of all is to know Jesus Crucified, and the best kind of authority is the ability to control our passions and to subject ourselves to the will of God. It is in this sense that we must become little children before God and before man. Then Jesus Christ will love us and will grant us His favours.

3. There is one last thing which the Infant Jesus requires of each of us. Nobody else can know what it is, but we know well what He wants. There is bound to be some resolution which we have formed many times in the past but have never properly fulfilled because it cost us too much. Let us not refuse Jesus this sacrifice, for He has loved us so much and has sacrificed Himself entirely for us. As a result of this meditation, let us at last put this resolution into effect with generosity and firmness.

¹ Mt. 18, 2.

24th December

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

IX. *The Holy Family*

1. We have in the Holy Family the highest possible models of perfection—Jesus, Mary and Joseph. As God, Jesus is essentially holy. By means of the Hypostatic Vision this sanctity is transmitted also to His human nature. The holiness of Jesus was only gradually revealed as He grew older, because He wished to be like us in everything save in sin.

As the Gospel says, He *advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men.*¹ Therefore, Jesus did not dazzle the world from the very beginning with the splendours of Mount Tabor. He gave us instead an example of holiness which we should find it easier to imitate because it was eternally increasing all the time.

He offered us as an example the kind of sanctity which has its beginning and foundation in utter humility and detachment from worldly goods. *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*²

Socrates advised his followers to have few desires and to desire these as little as possible in order to remain content, for the man who is full of desires is always uneasy and restless. This human counsel is very true, but it is incomplete. It recommends detachment from earthly things, but fails to teach the ardent and practical desire for supernatural things. Jesus Christ teaches us both. After He has urged us to become gentle and humble like Him, after He has told us not to worry about the future and not to fret about what to wear and what to eat, He points out the way in which Providence clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air. Then He adds: *Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be given you besides.*³

We must limit and moderate our desire for earthly goods, therefore, but should ardently yearn to love God, to serve and obey Him in this life and to enjoy Him for ever in Heaven. This is what the Infant Jesus wishes to teach us.

2. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the second model proposed for our imitation in the Holy Family. She is the purest and most beautiful creature ever fashioned by the hand of God. As Mother of the Word Incarnate, her dignity touches the divine. Preserved from all stain of sin from the moment of her conception, she is full of grace. Except in God Himself, no greater beauty and holiness can be found elsewhere than in Mary.

We do not read that Mary worked miracles, had ecstasies, or possessed any extraordinary external gifts. Her sanctity was completely internal. She trod the ordinary way of perfection, therefore the way most easily imitated by us, and nevertheless reached the highest peak of holiness. Since we are her devoted and affectionate sons, let us ask her for the grace to follow her in the way of perfection and of complete resignation to the will

of God. Although we may have to follow her from afar, let us follow with enthusiasm.

3. The third member of the Holy Family is St. Joseph, the most just of men, faithful to his vocation as foster-father of the Child Jesus and chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary. Let us imitate his purity, his utter dedication to the service of God, and His burning love for Jesus, Whom he was privileged to clasp to his breast before any other man. Let us ask him to obtain for us the grace to be able to imitate him in his life so that we may also imitate him in his holy death. May he who died with Jesus and Mary by his side obtain peace for us in our final agony, so that we may expire with the names of Jesus and Mary on our lips and in our hearts.

¹ Luke 2, 52.

² Mt. 11, 29.

³ Cf. Luke 12, 22-31.

25th December

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

1. The world ignores the birth of Jesus. There is no room for Him in the inns of Bethlehem, and no room for Mary and Joseph, two poverty-stricken travellers, who are obliged as a result to take refuge in a miserable hovel. In the world it is always so, for men judge one another by external appearances and by financial standards.

How do we behave towards Jesus Christ? How do we behave towards the needy and the afflicted in whom we should discern the Person of Christ Himself?

If we are prepared to open our hearts to Jesus and to welcome Him as our King and absolute Master, we shall be so transformed that we shall live His life and act in unison with Him. In short, we shall become saints. But if we are lacking in generosity and are reluctant to welcome Jesus unreservedly into our hearts, we

shall never be more than half-christian, tepid and ungrateful. We should even be prepared to welcome the poor as the representatives of Christ. *As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, He has assured us, you did it for me.*¹

Before the cave at Bethlehem, then, we should learn two great lessons. We should learn to love Jesus intensely as our highest and only good, and we should learn to love in an effective and practical way those who are poverty-stricken or suffering, in whom we should be able to see Jesus Christ Himself.

2. While the earth, plunged in darkness, ignores the birth of Jesus, the sky brightens above the lowly barn in which the Infant is lying. The voices of Angels are heard singing a sweet refrain which will echo through the centuries. *Glory to God in the highest, they chant, and on earth peace among men of good will.*²

The world rejects and despises Jesus; one day, moreover, He will be condemned as a criminal and crucified. What happens to Jesus is what always happens to truth and justice, which are often spurned by men, but are always victorious in the end. For a time truth and justice may seem to have been defeated once and for all, but then they triumph in an extraordinary manner. The example of Christ is enough to convince us of this.

Let us never reject Jesus Christ, however. Let us refuse to trample on His holy law or to crucify Him again by our sins. Let us listen to the chorus of Angels singing. Let us make our lives a hymn of praise to Almighty God, and then we shall have that peace of heart which is reserved for men of good will.

3. The first people to pay homage to Jesus Christ are not men of exalted rank, but humble shepherds. They come to offer their poor gifts, but above all else they offer Him their simple and innocent hearts.

We also should approach the manger with humility and simplicity. Foremost among the gifts which we offer should be the renunciation of sin, a firm resolution to resist our lower

inclinations, and a great love for Him Who has loved us so much. There are no more pleasing gifts which we could offer Jesus Christ on His Birthday.

¹ Mt. 25, 40.

² Luke 2, 14.

26th December

ST. STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

1. Among the original seven deacons nominated by the Apostles there was one named Stephen who was outstanding for his sanctity and extraordinary spiritual gifts. Being enlightened by God, this young man dared to rebuke the Jews in public for their hardness of heart and openly defended the doctrine of Christ, whom he proclaimed to be the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. One day when he was threatened by his foes, Stephen raised his eyes trustfully towards Heaven and said: *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.* The Jews could no longer restrain their fury and proceeded to drag the young man outside the city. There they left their garments in the care of a youth named Saul while they savagely stoned Stephen to death. Stricken to his knees by the force of the missiles, the saintly young disciple continued to look towards Heaven. *Lord Jesus,* he cried, *receive my spirit.* Before he breathed his last, he forgave his enemies in the manner of his divine Master. *Lord,* he prayed, *do not lay this sin against them.* And with these words he fell asleep.¹

Let us admire and imitate the courage of this martyr. We may never be called on to endure a martyrdom of blood on behalf of our faith, but we shall almost certainly be obliged to undergo the martyrdom of the assault of the passions on our purity of soul, or of severe physical or mental suffering . . . If we accept these trials from God with perfect resignation and love, they will certainly prove as valuable to us as real martyr-

dom. If we endure them with the courage and fortitude of St. Stephen, we shall be rewarded as He was by seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God and offering us the palm of victory.

2. Saul was a member of the band which led Stephen to his death. He did not actually take part in the stoning of the saintly deacon, but he co-operated with the executioners. It is possible that, as he lay dying, Stephen looked up at Saul and uttered his last prayer for this sincere and honest young Jew who had been led astray by the prejudice and passion of the mob. In God's plan the martyrdom of Stephen was in some way connected with the conversion of St. Paul, who was soon afterwards dramatically won over by the grace of God on the road to Damascus.

3. Let us endeavour also to suffer, pray and work for the conversion of our fellow-men, so many of whom are wandering in the darkness of error or struggling in the clutches of vice. Let us try by our sufferings, prayers and good example to draw down God's grace on our unhappy brothers. If we succeed, we shall share in the merits of their good actions, and we shall have ensured our own everlasting salvation.

¹ Cf. Acts 7, 51-60; 8, 1-2.

27th December

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

1. St. John was the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ. He was allowed, along with St. Peter and St. James, to enjoy the glory of the Transfiguration, and he was invited with them into the Garden of Gethsemane to witness the agony of our divine Redeemer. In the Cenacle, moreover, after he had received the Blessed Eucharist, he was the only one of the Apostles privileged to rest his head on the breast of Jesus. He stood at the foot of the Cross on Mount Calvary and heard his Master entrust to him with His dying breath the most precious treasure which

still remained to Him on earth, the Blessed Virgin Mary. *Son, behold thy Mother.*

It is true that Jesus loved all His Apostles, to all of whom He granted the happiness of enjoying His company, listening to His teaching, and witnessing His miracles. Even so, He had a special affection for St. John. This was because John was a virgin when Jesus called him, and remained so all his life. The state of virginity is especially pleasing to God. It makes us like the Angels and, in a sense, superior to them, since these pure spirits are naturally chaste, and we can only succeed in being so by means of great self-control. *Blessed are the clean of heart, says Jesus in the Gospel, for they shall see God.*¹

The privilege of the vision of God is attributed in a special way to the clean of heart. Therefore St. John, the virgin Apostle, begins his Gospel with a description of the intimate life of the eternal God. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.*² He soars above the earth like an eagle, as St. Jerome observes, and penetrates into the presence of God Himself.

We know that we shall never be called to scale such heights. We may not even have a vocation to live as virgins. But we are all required to be clean of heart. Purity is a virtue which all Christians should possess in whatever manner is appropriate to their position in life. Let us examine ourselves strictly on this matter and make suitable resolutions for the future.

2. St. John proved himself worthy of His Master's special favour. He never deserted Christ. He was present at the Agony in Gethsemane. He was in the courtyard of the High Priest when Peter denied Christ, but he remained faithful. He was the only Apostle present at the foot of the Cross on Mount Calvary, where he was privileged to hear Our Lord's last words.

After the Resurrection John was one of the first to hurry to the sepulchre. Like the other Apostles, he proved his undying love for Jesus by enduring the pains of martyrdom, although

his life was miraculously spared. He spent his long life studying how to love and serve Jesus Christ. Can the same be said for us? We have not been granted the privileges given to St. John, but we have received countless favours from God. Let us learn from the example of this great Apostle how to co-operate generously with the grace of God.

3. Both in his Gospel and in his letters St. John continually emphasises the virtue of charity. He stresses the need for love of God and love of our neighbour. *God is love*, he writes, *and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in Him.*³ According to St. Jerome, when the Apostle John was almost a hundred years old and lacked the strength to speak for very long, he was accustomed to go supported by his disciples to gatherings of the faithful. There he repeated on every occasion the same exhortation: *My children, love one another.* His followers grew tired of this and finally asked him why he kept repeating the same phrase. *Because that is God's command*, he replied, *and if we do no more than obey it, that is sufficient.*

Let us meditate on his words and let us remember that our love for God is futile unless it is accompanied by a practical love for our neighbour. The love of God cannot be separated from the love of our fellow-men.

¹ Mt. 5, 8.

² John 1, 1.

³ 1 John 4, 16.

28th December

THE VALUE OF AN HOUR

1. There are twenty-four hours in a day, eight thousand seven hundred and sixty in a year. How have you spent all the hours which God has given you in the past? How do you intend to use the hours which He will give you in the future?

When you examine the past, you will find much to regret. Perhaps you have spent many hours in sin, in idle gossip, in

useless or dangerous pastimes, or in innumerable business transactions, all of which will contribute nothing towards your eternal salvation, which should be your main concern in life.

How much time have you spent thinking of God, your Creator and Redeemer? How many hours have you devoted to prayer, thanksgiving, and penance? How many have you spent in apostolic work on behalf of your neighbour? It may be that the service of God and your spiritual welfare have so far been the least of your worries, on which you have expended no more than the few odd moments left over from your other preoccupations. You are well aware, nevertheless, that the purpose of life is to know, love, and serve God. You know that you ought to offer Him all your thoughts, affections, and actions, for He alone can make you happy.

2. This does not mean, of course, that we are obliged to spend all our hours engaged either in prayer or in penance or in apostolic work. God does not demand this much. The bow which is extended too far will snap. We need rest, sleep, and recreation. But the most pleasant hours should be those which we dedicate to the love and service of God. The hours, moreover, which we devote to our work, rest, or enjoyment, should be spent in the presence of God. From time to time we should think of Him and speak to Him. We should love also to interweave our conversations in a natural manner with spiritual reflections for the edification of our neighbour.

3. Let us now contemplate the fact that our eternity can depend on a single hour. Within an hour the repentant thief was converted and gained Heaven. In one hour Mary Magdalen, St. Paul, and many other Saints finally yielded to the grace of God and set out on the road to sanctity. There are vital hours in our lives, too. It will be disastrous for us if we ever let the hour of grace slip away neglected. Let us listen when God calls us and let us be generous with Him as He has been infinitely generous towards us. If we behave in this manner, we need

never fear the hour of death. It will still be the hour on which our eternity depends, but it will be an eternity of everlasting happiness.

29th December

OUR FREQUENT LAPSES

1. It is sad to have to admit that, in spite of our good resolutions and in spite of the graces which we receive from God, we continue to fall into sin. Our continual lapses can cause us to become discouraged. This, however, is a device of the devil, who has already lured us into sin and now proceeds to suggest thoughts of despair. He wishes to convince us that resistance is useless, that our nature is completely corrupt, and that there is no escape for us.

My dear children, wrote St. John to the early Christians, 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; and he is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world.¹ 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.² He who says that he knows him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. But he who keeps his word, in him the love of God is truly perfected.³

It is clear, therefore, that we ought to avoid sin by every means in our power, because it extinguishes our charity and brings death to the soul. Nevertheless, even if we continue to fall into sin, we should never lose heart. Discouragement and despair are stratagems of the devil. No matter how great and how numerous our sins may be, God is always prepared to pardon them. Let us recall the example of Mary Magdalen, of the repentant thief, and of the prodigal son. As long as we

repent sincerely we may be sure that God will forgive us and clasp us to His breast, for God is infinitely merciful.

2. The mercy of God, however, should not provide us with a reason for continuing to fall into sin. On the contrary, it should be a motive for greater gratitude and love. We cannot claim that it is impossible for us to conquer temptation. If we implore God's grace and employ all the means of resistance at our disposal, temptation cannot overcome us.

How often in the past, when we prayed fervently and fought with determination, have we not successfully routed temptation? Why cannot we do the same again? Then we shall have interior peace in this life and an everlasting reward in the next. *God is faithful*, St. Paul assures us, *and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.*⁴

3. There is a golden rule which we should always remember, as it will be helpful to us in fighting temptation and in resisting discouragement. It is simply this: As long as we implore God's grace and do all we can and ought to do in order to withstand the onslaught of temptation, God will do the rest.

If God nevertheless allows us to fall, this will be in order to humble us and to make us understand more clearly that we can do nothing without Him. When we fall, moreover, we may be certain that in His infinite goodness He will accept our repentance and forgive us.

¹ I John 2, 1-2.

² I John 1, 9.

³ I John 2, 5.

⁴ I Cor. 10, 13.

30th December

DISSIPATION

1. Dissipation leads to tepidity, and tepidity leads to sin. Why are we dissipated? So much beauty and goodness surrounds us,

created by God for our benefit. It often happens that when we gaze on worldly beauty, we become inordinately attached to it. We see worldly goods and desire too ardently to possess them. We forget that the beauty of this earth is only a fleeting reflection of the eternal beauty of God, and that the good things of creation are gifts from God. Everything which is good and beautiful in this world, therefore, should raise our minds and hearts towards God and prompt us to love Him Who created it. Unfortunately, we often stop half-way, forget God, and begin to seek in creatures the perfect satisfaction which they are incapable of giving us.

Dissipation is the neglect of spiritual things and the inordinate attachment to creatures. It causes us to lead worldly lives and to think only of material interests, money, pleasure, and sometimes sin. If we find that we have fallen into this wretched state, let us act at once. Let us remember that we were not created like the animals for the satisfaction of the senses, but were made for everlasting spiritual happiness. Only God can satisfy our immortal souls, whereas created things, loved for their own sake, eventually leave us bitter and disillusioned. *What does it profit a man, asks Sacred Scripture, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹

2. If we forget God in our frantic search for creatures, God leaves us alone. No longer do we experience His inspirations and the desire to be holy and to gain Heaven. Our lives become mediocre. We do not wish to fall into serious sin, because we have not lost the fear of God and are still capable of remorse of conscience. Our intellects and wills, however, have become entangled in worldly objects. We rarely think of God, because we are preoccupied with worldly affairs.

What is to be the outcome of all this? We cannot remain in this state very long. Our spiritual life lacks the supernatural nourishment of grace, with the result that slowly but surely we slip from dissipation into sin. *With desolation is all the land made*

*desolate, laments the Holy Spirit, because there is none that considereth in the heart.*²

3. Imagine the death of the dissipated man. When he reaches the end of his earthly journey, it will seem to him as if he has awakened from a dream. Everything is over now. Gone for ever are the objects of desire which he exerted himself so feverishly to acquire. He is alone before God. Money, ease, and pleasure have vanished like snow melting in the sun.

Please God we shall never experience this fearful reawakening. Let us rouse ourselves now, while there is still time, from our spiritual torpor. May God be our first thought and our first desire. May constant prayer, detachment from the world, and steady progress in perfection win for us the everlasting happiness of Heaven.

¹ Mt. 16, 26.

² Jer. 12, 11.

31st December

THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR

1. The last day of the year has come. It should be a day of reckoning and of resolution. Think of the many benefits which God has conferred on you throughout your life, but especially in the year which is now drawing to a close.

Count the temporal favours which you have received. Many of your friends and acquaintances have died during the year, but you are still alive. God has rescued you from innumerable perils and illnesses. He has allowed you more time in which to perfect your spiritual life and to perform apostolic work on your neighbour's behalf. Try not to be like the barren tree in the Gospel, because this could be your final year of trial.

Count the spiritual blessings which you have received. Think of the graces and good inspirations which God has given you

during the past twelve months. How often have you received forgiveness for your sins, been restored to the friendship of God, and experienced anew the joy and peace of being in the state of grace? How often has Jesus come into your heart under the guise of the Blessed Eucharist? How often have you been enlightened and encouraged by hearing or reading the word of God? Think, too, of the good example which you have received in private and in public, and recall the many occasions on which the helping hand of God has reached out to save you from falling into sin.

You could never show sufficient gratitude for all these favours. Spend this day at least in acts of repentance and thanksgiving, and promise God to be faithful to Him in the coming year.

2. Now that the year is almost over, cast your mind back to the good resolutions which you made at the beginning of it. Have you put these resolutions into effect? Has there been any improvement in your spiritual life during these twelve months, or must you confess that it has deteriorated? How often have you committed sin, perhaps even grave sin, during the year? When God appealed to you to perform some good action, how often did you refuse Him?

Your future outlook is very dark if your life has developed into a gradual descent towards evil. Any day God could grow tired of your ingratitude and obstinacy and send death to end your infidelity. Then you would almost certainly be damned for ever. If you have surrendered to spiritual languor and mediocrity, therefore, it is time for you to stir yourself. It is time to become more generous with God, to display a greater spirit of self-sacrifice in responding to His appeals, and to form firmer resolutions.

Virtue cannot co-exist with spiritual tepidity, which leads inevitably towards sin.

3. After he had spent a night fishing on the lake of Galilee without having caught anything, St. Peter was ordered by Jesus

to cast his nets back into the sea. *Master*, the future Apostle replied, *the whole night through we have toiled and have taken nothing; but at thy word I will lower the net.* This act of perfect confidence in our Lord was soon rewarded, for when the fishermen lowered the net, *they enclosed a great number of fishes.*¹

Perhaps we have toiled hard and made many sacrifices during the past year. But have we worked with and for Jesus Christ? We may have thought more of ourselves than of Jesus and as a result achieved little or nothing in the spiritual life. The remedy is clear. We must remain close to Jesus, working with Him, in Him, and for Him. Then He will bless and strengthen the good resolutions which we are about to make. The secret of perfection is to live in constant union with Jesus Christ.

¹ Luke 5, 5-6.

THE AUTHOR

Cardinal Bacci has exercised his priestly office in the Vatican, serving on several of the Congregations. He has worked in the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments, the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and the Sacred Congregation of Religious.

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