

LIFE OF UNION WITH MARY

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Introductory Letter

Liege, September 12, 1954

Reverend Father,

Your books, your articles, and the counsels you have lavished upon many souls have made you a great apostle of Mary, a worthy disciple of Father Chaminade.

In this work, which I have the pleasure of presenting to the Catholic public, you summarize substantially your previous writings and permit us to profit by your wide experience.

You give us solid doctrine.

Perhaps not all theologians will agree with certain of your assertions. But there is place in theology for a healthy liberty.

Without reserve I praise and admire the manner in which you present and explain the delicate questions of mystical theology.

I congratulate you upon the practical and profitable character of your book.

All can draw abundantly from it for the enlightenment, the nourishment, and the development of their Marian devotion.

Each one will find there exactly what he needs.

More than once you remark very appropriately that "the reader should take only what is for him," that he should aim at simplifying, not at encumbering, his spiritual life.

You show very well that love of the Blessed Virgin is not a complication nor an aside in Christianity, for, as doctrine and experience prove, Mary naturally turns us toward Jesus, and by Him, toward the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

I have been struck by the words which you quote from a great servant of the Blessed Virgin, Brother Marie-Leonard: "Devotion to Mary is not the whole of our religion. The whole of our religion is Jesus. But whoever gives himself to Mary is led by her to her Son."

Reverend Father, I wish that many souls would place themselves

under your guidance in the school of Mary, become more and more conscious of her gentle and salutary influence, and thus advance rapidly in the interior life out of which arises true apostolic fruitfulness.

May the Immaculate Mary, Virgin of the poor, bless your efforts and reward the labors which you consecrate to her.

Louis Joseph Kerkhofs

Bishop of Liege, Belgium

Author's Foreword

In several of my books' I had occasion to touch upon life of union with Mary. I treated the subject specifically in a series of articles published in *La Voix de Notre-Dame de Chartres*¹ and in *La Vie Spirituelle*.² Here I wish to present it as completely and practically as possible.

According to a number of confidences received, I know that many readers of my other works eagerly await the present study. I hope they will not be disappointed with it.

My sources are, first of all, the Marian doctrine, the "spirit and life," presented in my works, *Marie dans le Dogme*³ and *La Dévotion à Marie*.³ I have drawn also from my experience with persons who have lived in intimacy with the Blessed Virgin, from great servants of Mary whose biographies and writings allow us to perceive something of their intimate relations with our heavenly Mother, and from Christians, still pilgrims on this earth, who apply themselves in a special way to finding Jesus with Mary.

During fifty years, God has placed me as a priest in contact with a number of persons devoted to Mary in different countries. These were not only members of the Society of Mary and Daughters of Mary Immaculate, who are consecrated to the Blessed Virgin by a special vow, but also religious men and women of various orders and institutions, and spiritual persons living in diverse conditions in the world. It goes without saying that I shall make use of their

¹ Particularly in *Mon Idéal, Jésus Fils de Marie*, Editions Xavier Mappus, le Puy, France; *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary* (English version) (Kirkwood, Mo.: Maryhurst Press, 1952); *La Dévotion à Marie*, Editions Xavier Mappus; *La Doctrine Mariale de Monsieur Chaminade*, Editions du Cerf, in *Cahiers de la Vierge*, 20; *Marie et notre Sacerdoce*, Editions Spes.

² From 1936 to 1939.

³ January 1, 1937.

¹ Third edition, Editions Spes, 1954; *Mary in Doctrine* (English version) (Milwaukee, Wis.: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954).

⁵ Editions Xavier Mappus, Le Puy.

confidences only within the limits of the strictest discretion and that their individual testimonies will not be cited without the permission of the authors.

The book will treat of an ordinary and of a mystical union with Mary. The latter term may frighten some readers, suggesting all kinds of strange phenomena found in the lives of the saints, such as revelations, visions, apparitions, ecstasies, and raptures. "That's not for me," they will say. They are right in thinking that such unusual things will probably never occur in their own lives. But that is not what we have in mind in speaking of mystical union with Mary. There is question here of an interior action of the Blessed Virgin, beyond complete human comprehension, which permits the person to act like anyone else except that his union with Mary is much more intimate, more loving, and more fruitful. This will be explained in the second part of the book. Even persons who will never arrive at such a more intimate union will profit by reading the section which treats of it, because it will make them understand more clearly the suggestions and practices connected with ordinary union with Mary. These practices were discovered by persons who had arrived at a mystical union with her although the practices in themselves do not necessarily presuppose such a mystical union. Finding them repeated in the second part of this work, the reader will better understand their scope.

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Preliminary Considerations

CHAPTER ONE

Importance of This Life of Union

ALL deeply religious persons aspire to union with Mary. Perhaps they cannot analyze the motives which prompt them to seek this union, but they are convinced that in constant intimacy with the Mother of Jesus they will experience a distinct joy and will gain great advantage for their spiritual life.

This conviction develops ordinarily by degrees, by reason of experience. Here is how one religious describes the process:

In the beginning of my religious life, strict obedience to my spiritual director rather than conviction led me gradually to live intimately with Mary; gradually also the profound certainty of the importance of union with Mary in the interior life took deep root in my soul. This certitude was the result of meditation, of study on the role of Mary in the spiritual life, and of almost daily experience in applying the truths meditated upon. . . .

By living intimately with my Mother I am gaining a new kind of knowledge of her action which I shall call "experimental," and I feel a great desire to contemplate the realities of her spiritual motherhood in order to understand them still better. . . .

I have become so convinced that I cannot arrive at perfection without living united to Mary that it has become impossible for me to consider any spiritual work otherwise than as a total "surrender" of myself to my Mother, so that she may transform me into Jesus. In what does this surrender consist? In a passive abandonment? Quite the contrary; it is a constant effort to divert the natural current of my life as much as possible from habitual procedure in order to perform all my actions only under the eye of my Mother. I have often found the expression, "under the eye of my Mother," in the spiritual writings of interior persons, notably in those of Dom Chautard and of Father Ratisbonne. It catches the sweet reality of the intimacy established between the soul and the Blessed Virgin.

At other times, this conviction seizes the soul almost suddenly, ordinarily after an act or a series of acts of great generosity. Here is an experience of that kind:

Until near the age of fifteen, I did not apply myself to devotion to Mary any more than to pious practices in general, that is, without great fervor, although I lived in a house of aspirants to the religious life. I often annoyed my teachers and prefects by my light-headedness during class and study periods. One day a prefect reprimanded me for my conduct and imposed a punishment, adding that it would not be the last. To prove him wrong, I took the resolution to keep strict silence, depriving myself of dessert each time I failed. After a while I was surprised to find myself much more devout and I remember that from then on I experienced great happiness in thinking of Mary and in praying and singing to her. Finally I became fully convinced that by union with her I could arrive at a degree of perfection.

There are privileged persons who have felt themselves called to sanctity almost before the age of reason, for whom the necessity of an intimate union with Mary has always been like an article of faith. For them the call to union with Jesus has been equivalent to the call to union with the Blessed Virgin. Such, for example, was the case of St. John Berchmans or of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.

It must be admitted, however, that not all sincere Catholics aspire to a life of union with Mary.

Some do not consider it seriously because they imagine it is not for them, but for privileged souls only.

Some are not interested because they think it will require sacrifices and efforts which they are not disposed to make.

Some find it puzzling and shrug it off as too complicated.

A certain number condemn it in the name of dogma, as though the Blessed Virgin were made to usurp the place reserved only for Christ. Here, for instance, are the experiences of a theologian:

The conviction that to become a saint one had to live united with Mary came to me very slowly.

For a long time I believed that this union was something exaggerated and that one had first to live as much as possible in the presence of God. Because of personal difficulties, I fell into a kind of lukewarmness, saying to myself that, after all, everyone could not be a saint.

Through spiritual direction I was led to put the Blessed Virgin more and more into my life. My generosity returned. But theological scruples

—I feared to give too much to the Blessed Virgin — prevented me from accepting this life of union with Mary wholeheartedly. In this state of mind I did not dare consider a total giving of myself realistically. My return to Mary, however, did lead me at the time to make an almost impossible effort. The steadily increasing invocation of Mary gained other victories for me. Why did I not use this means more frequently?

Then, in the course of a retreat, I understood that I was doing things by halves, that it would be necessary to abandon *everything* to my Mother in heaven.

Shortly after, thanks to a fellow religious and to spiritual direction, I saw even more clearly that it was necessary, not to *put* the Blessed Virgin in my spiritual life, but *to find her there*, to realize her maternal role. Another confrere helped me in proving, by his own example, that recourse to Mary in the smallest things, particularly in the apostolate, was always crowned with success. . . .

Now I find that this union is of prime importance, for it assures total success.

For some, the life of union with Mary is only a matter of attraction which depends on personal vocation or on temperament. One soul feels itself drawn to a life of union with Jesus in the Eucharist; another, to a marked devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; a third, to the contemplation of Jesus suffering; a fourth, to a life of union with Mary. Souls of a sanguine or nervous temperament experience this last attraction more easily. Why not let each one follow the way that God seems to have marked out for him by instinctive preference or special call?

It is true that according to the doctrine of St. Paul, "each one has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that."¹ What is true for each man in particular is especially true of each religious society. In general it can be said that God has confided to each of them the special mission of reproducing, from among all the dispositions of Christ, a particular disposition with an altogether special perfection; the one, His love of poverty; another, His spirit of obedience; another, His life of recollection, His life as a victim, His zeal for the glory of the Father, His compassion for the sick, His love for sinners, etc. If none of them, by this kind of division of work, can reproduce in all their perfection all the dispositions of Jesus, the*

¹ 1 Cor. 7:7.

ensemble of religious and saints can reproduce all of these dispositions with all the perfection possible to beings born in sin. Whatever be the proper spirit of each saint and of each religious order, it is a fact that all those who arrive at perfection are distinguished by a close union with the Blessed Virgin: Bernard, Ignatius, Vincent Ferrer, Leonard of Port Maurice, Alphonse Liguori, Berulle, Olier, the Curé of Ars, Vincent de Paul, Catherine Labouré, Bernadette Soubirous, Chaminade, and so many others — each one of them had his proper gift and special temperament, but all lived a life of intimacy with Mary. They did not all have a sanguine or nervous temperament: Ignatius was bilious; Chaminade was what was formerly called lymphatic.

These citations and examples should demonstrate that it would be wrong to be uninterested *a priori* in the life of union with Mary. The direct description of the life of intimacy with the Mother of Jesus will prove positively its extreme importance by showing its marvelous results.

But before undertaking this description, it will be well to make some general remarks on the manner of studying the life of union with Mary.

CHAPTER TWO

Take Only What Applies to You

THE reader will find in these pages a good number of suggestions and practices supplied by all kinds of clients of Mary, some of whom have been canonized by the Church. If his intention is to acquire only a theoretical knowledge of the life of union with Mary, he may read the chapters which follow, make a summary or take notes for his files, if he judges fit, then close the book and place it on the shelf of religious psychology. But probably the greater number of readers will look for something with which to nourish their piety toward the Mother of God. For these latter, some counsels on the use of this study seem necessary.

First of all, as in the acquisition of every science or art, advance must be gradual. There can be no skipping of steps in the process. No matter what aptitude a young man possesses, he will not be a virtuoso as soon as he has read a method of violin or piano and even learned it by heart. He must begin with what is elementary, understand it well, practice until he can play with a certain facility, and then only pass on to another step.

It will not be necessary, however, to try to reproduce all the practices mentioned in a given chapter before passing on to the following chapter. The experiences reported here have been lived by faithful clients, some of whom were beginners; others, souls devoted to intense spiritual work for ten, twenty, thirty years and more. Take for the present only what suits you for the present. Later, if you reread the same chapter, you will undoubtedly find suggestions suitable for you then which may not be suitable at all now.

There is another reason for choosing only what fits you. The practices and words reported come from persons of different temperaments, characters, sex, tendencies, social conditions, nationalities, professions,

etc. What is useful for one person could be troublesome for another; what is charming in a young saint risks being artificial in an old monk. St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa of Lisieux, and St. Catherine of Siena all loved our Lord with their whole heart; but one loved Him as a Spaniard, the other as a French woman, and the third as an Italian. We must love the Blessed Virgin according to our own nature; this is the will of God who has given us our nature. We must not believe ourselves obliged to use the means or to repeat the affectionate words of various servants of Mary simply because they were saints. It is related of St. John Eudes that frequently during conversation as a sign of belonging to the Blessed Virgin he would kiss the medal of the rosary which he habitually wore on his cincture. When asked the reason, he replied: "I do it out of love. Ardent lovers do not tire caressing a frail beauty which is only imaginary or borrowed. What should I not do for so good and beautiful a lady as my own?"¹ Other servants of Mary might have manifested their love just as truly during conversation without having recourse to such a practice. St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother, a young Italian Passionist, always addressed the Blessed Virgin as "Mama mia." The venerable canon of Bordeaux, William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Society of Mary and of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, while manifesting the most tender filial piety for the Mother of Jesus, was pleased habitually to call her "the august Mary." Each of these men expressed in his language what fitted his age and character, and they did very well. But no one is obliged to copy any one of them.

As we advance in union with Mary, we naturally adopt new practices. By so multiplying these practices we run the risk of hindering the spontaneity of soul so necessary in our relations with our heavenly Mother. Omitting some of them might appear a diminution of devotion to her. It is a fact of experience, however, that the more perfect the interior life becomes, the more simple it becomes. We must not scruple to sacrifice practices which were once necessary but now are burdensome. The baby needs his mother's hand to walk. But later, when he wants to romp and still has to hold her hand, what a torment for the little rascal! Dispositions of heart and will must always go on perfecting themselves; but practices not prescribed by

¹ *Saint Jean Eudes*, E. Georges, p. 401.

a rule or obedience should be abandoned as soon as they become a real hindrance.

The preface to the life of Brother Leonard of the Christian Brothers, a holy religious who reached an extremely close union with the Blessed Virgin before his death in 1946, relates how, on the occasion of a retreat, this venerable Brother went to submit his spiritual program to the retreat master. The multiplicity and complexity of practices in honor of the Blessed Virgin surprised the priest. He told the good Brother that these practices were too fatiguing, that he could replace them by frequent silent glances at the Blessed Virgin and thus renew an attitude of contemplation and joy in her presence.

The troubled countenance of the Brother relaxed into a smile of agreement. "Father," he exclaimed, "you are giving me my liberty! I imposed these practices because I thought them necessary. But they are against my inclinations and do me violence. I ask nothing better than to do what you say. Oh, how I thank you!"²

Before dropping a practice, however, it would be well to ask the Blessed Virgin about it, for fear of abandoning it out of inconstancy or lack of generosity.

It should be observed that if vows which a person is tempted to make in moments of fervor maintain generosity they are useful; if they merely promise the regular performance of a particular practice they are rather to be discouraged.

Perhaps all of these observations may be reduced to the following counsel: before reading a new chapter, say to Mary: "My Mother, teach me to understand what is good for me in this chapter."

² *De Marie à la Trinité, Frère Leonard, 1877-1946, Vie et Doctrine*, by Alda Marcel, 124, Cours Gambetta, Talence (Gironde) France, p. 10.

CHAPTER THREE

Do Not Separate What God Has United

Union with Mary does not constitute an autonomous province in Christian spirituality. The saints whom we cited in the preceding chapter as remarkable for their union with the Blessed Virgin are still more remarkable for their union with Jesus. This is true of all the saints and of all the great servants of Mary whose interior life we know, at least of those who have appeared since the eleventh century.

A number of them have not only lived this double union, but have insisted on its necessity. Cardinal de Berulle, for example, made this statement:

To speak of Mary is to speak of Jesus; to honor Mary is to honor Jesus; it is even honoring Jesus in his greatest work. . . . Jesus and Mary are so intimately bound together that we must not separate them in our devotions.

St. John Eudes employed practically the same words:

We must not separate what God has joined together so perfectly. Jesus and Mary are so intimately united that whoever sees Jesus sees Mary, whoever loves Jesus loves Mary, whoever has devotion to Jesus has devotion to Mary.¹

Only with reluctance would he allow the Blessed Virgin to be painted otherwise than with the Infant Jesus in her arms. On this point he often repeated the verses:

Pingenti solam sine Nato, Mater ajebat:
Me sine me potius pinge!²

¹ *Op. at.*, p. 400.

² *Op. at.*, p. 402. "To a painter who represented her without her Son, the Mother said: Represent me rather without myself; I would suffer less from it."

Father Chaminade generally mentions union with Jesus and union with Mary together. To his sodalists living as religious in the world he recommended this double union. "They will raise their heart and their mind to Mary," he wrote, "and, through her, to Jesus Christ."³ To his professed religious he gave the same counsel: "The Blessed Virgin and Our Lord, with whom you will always keep yourselves united, will make up for your weakness. . . ." And again: "Unite yourselves more and more with Our Lord and with the Blessed Virgin."⁴⁵

It is possible to find *devotions* to Mary that are somewhat selfish, undertaken to assure material help and sensible consolations, in which Jesus has hardly any part. These fall far short of true *union* with Mary. A real life of union with the Blessed Virgin without at the same time an increasing union with Christ does not exist, at least not for very long.

St. Margaret Mary relates in her autobiography:

The most Blessed Virgin has always taken wonderful care of me. I have always had recourse to her in all my needs, and she has saved me from very great dangers. I did not dare address myself to her divine Son, but always to her in the Rosary, kneeling with bare knees on the ground or at least genuflecting and kissing the earth at each Ave?

We know well that the Blessed Virgin did not keep Margaret Mary for herself but prepared her for a life of exceptional union with her Son. But her union with Mary did not diminish on that account—far from it. The saint relates that one day our Lord said to her: "I have placed you in the care of my holy Mother, as a deposit in trust, so that she may fashion you according to my pattern."⁶

If intimate union with Mary does not exist without intimate union with Jesus, there is nevertheless a certain evolution in the relation between these two unions.

In the beginning, it is almost an instinctive movement that impels

³ *Esprit de notre Fondation*; in English, *The Spirit of Our Foundation* (unpublished documents of Father Chaminade, in three tomes; abbreviation S. F.), t. I, paragraph 131.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, I, 321.

⁵ *Vie et oeuvres de la bienheureuse Marguerite Marie Alacoque*, by Mgr. Gauthey, t. I, p. 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the pious soul to draw closer to Mary. The child finds great happiness in remaining as long as possible with its mother. Will it not find even greater happiness if this mother is its heavenly Mother? The soul soon becomes aware that it causes pleasure to Jesus in living, as formerly He did on earth and now lives in heaven, close to her who is dearer to Him than all the rest of creation.

After a short time the soul notices that the Mother unites it more closely to the Son, and this realization strengthens its union with both of them.

The soul will make a distinct advance in this double union when it discovers from its union with Mary that imitation of the Mother must consist not so much in reproducing her actions and virtues as in copying her interior dispositions. Then the soul will penetrate into the soul of Mary and there will see and feel vividly that its Mother lived, worked, and suffered only for Jesus, that she never had interests other than the interests of Jesus, that Jesus has always been, and continues to be, the sole reason of her being, that He is her all. And, endeavoring to make the dispositions of Mary its own, it will wish, like Mary and with Mary, to live, work, act, and suffer only for Jesus. Its union with Jesus will suddenly increase in a remarkable manner, for it will be a sharing of Mary's union with Him. At the same time, union with Mary will also increase because the soul will see itself indebted to Mary for this marvelous closeness to Jesus.

Another discovery will strengthen the soul's union with Jesus and Mary still more. This will be the realization of the truth that if "it is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me,"⁷ then by a necessary consequence, it is now no longer I that love Mary; it is Christ who loves her in me.

In the measure that the soul advances in union with Mary, and through Mary in union with Jesus, it always perceives more clearly the intimate bonds that exist between the two unions until — especially if the soul merits to receive the "gift of the presence of Mary," which will be discussed in the second part—a moment arrives when it will not be possible to think of Mary without thinking of Jesus, nor to think of Jesus without thinking of Mary.

⁷ Gal. 2:20.

There can be no question of wanting immediately to introduce all these points of view into the soul's life of union with Mary. "Take at present only what fits you at present." But it is good at least to know that, in order to understand clearly this life of union with the Mother and to make progress in it, it must be viewed as much as possible in the light of Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

Consecrate Yourself to Mary

An explicit consecration to Mary is not indispensable for a life of union with her. With the realization that one is a child of Mary comes the natural impulse to live in union with her, just as any child desires to be close to his mother. St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, who passed her life in such intimacy with the Blessed Virgin, seems never to have made any special act of consecration to her.

Experience teaches, however, that a soul particularly devoted to Mary generally feels that his consecration will impel him with greater generosity to an even deeper life of union with her who is so dear to him.

Consecration to Mary is somewhat akin to the baptismal vows. Even without renewing these vows the baptized person belongs to God for life. But in order to live this belonging to God in every circumstance of life, it is helpful at a solemn moment of his life to renew his baptismal vows and even, according to a recommendation of the Council of Trent, to make this renewal often. Especially in certain critical moments will this renewal aid him in emphasizing the conviction that he has already renounced Satan and chosen Jesus Christ for his sole Master. Similarly, a solemn consecration to the Blessed Virgin recalls for the son of Mary his obligations to his Mother in heaven, and, if the act is frequently renewed, it is a powerful help to living that consecration with ever increasing perfection.

Brother Leonard of the Christian Brothers, who died in 1946, had achieved an extremely close union with the Blessed Virgin. He explained it by his consecration to her. "The life of union," he wrote, "is a consequence of this consecration. Indeed, having become the property of Mary by a solemn and irrevocable donation of self, I could no longer live outside of her with my thoughts centered on

myself. My first duty, then, is to renounce self in order to honor Mary. How shall I attain this end? By acting in such a way that I shall be in perpetual dependence upon her good pleasure."¹

In her autobiography, Mother Sorazu, the great Marian mystic of Spain at the beginning of the present century, relates that on returning to her cell after her religious profession, she knelt before the image of Mary Immaculate and "consecrated herself to Our Lady with great faith, enthusiasm, and fervor, in the quality of slave, subordinate, disciple, and child." It is noteworthy that she had never heard of De Montfort's *Treatise on True Devotion*. Concerning her consecration she wrote:

I chose the Blessed Virgin as my Queen, my Superioress, my Mistress, my Directress and Mother. . . . I felt a trust in the Blessed Virgin that was absolute and filial, an extraordinary enthusiasm for La Sefiora, and an invincible love — a love and enthusiasm that went on increasing day by day. . . .

From the hour of my consecration I did everything in union with the Blessed Virgin. On her feasts I enjoyed unspeakable happiness. On these days, as well as during the month of May, the world seemed transformed into heaven and I experienced an indescribable spiritual renewal. . . . This was the beginning of my spiritual life, the foundation stone of the mystical temple which the Lord erected in my soul. To my perfect consecration to Mary, and to the prompt response of La Sefiora and her fidelity to her promises, I owe my happiness and the numerous and exceptional graces which God has lavished upon me in the course of my religious life. . . .²

Consecration to Mary has been practiced since the late Middle Ages. Already in the mid-seventh century, St. Ildephonsus, Archbishop of Toledo, spoke of it in glowing terms.³ Since then it has taken on various forms. Two principal forms which exist today are the Holy Slavery of St. Louis Mary de Montfort and the Apostolic Filial Piety of Father Chaminade.

The former consists in giving ourselves entirely to the Blessed

¹ *De Marie à la Trinité*, Frère Leonard, 1877-1946, *Vie et Doctrine*, by Alda Marcel, 124 Cours Gambetta, Talence (Gironde), France, p. 309.

² *Vida de la R. M. Angeles Sorazu, Abadesa de las Concepcionistas Franciscanas del Convento de la Purisima Concepcion de Valladolid*. Primera parte o Autobiografia "Mi Historia," revisada y anotada por el R. P. Nazario Pérez, S.J., tomo I, p. 49 f.

³ Migne, *P.L.* 96, col. 105-108.

Virgin in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. We give to Mary: (a) our body with all its senses and members; (Z>) our soul with all its powers; (c) our external goods, both those we have and those we shall acquire; (d) our internal and spiritual goods.⁴⁵ In order to make this consecration effective, De Montfort recommends that all actions be performed through Mary, with Mary, in Mary, and for Mary.⁶

The consecration according to Father Chaminade also consists in giving to the Blessed Virgin all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do. "The die is cast," he exclaims, "all that we are is at the service of Mary with all our goods and all the faculties of our being; she may use them as she pleases for the greater glory of her Son."⁶

Father Chaminade did not know of De Montfort's treatise on holy slavery. The consecration which he proposes to his disciples differs only slightly on certain points. Chaminade insists much on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and on our identification with Jesus, as well as upon the spiritual maternity of Mary and her apostolic mission in the world. Since we are one with Jesus, we ought to reproduce His filial love for His Mother; and since Mary, associated with the Redeemer, has received the mission of destroying the empire of Satan, we must second her action in this task. Hence the filial and apostolic character of this consecration.⁷

Whatever be the form of consecration adopted, the important thing is to live it sincerely, but this, according to De Montfort,⁸ is not generally the case. To live this consecration sincerely means to impregnate our whole life with it. To attain that end, we must recall it often and renew it frequently. The moments naturally suited to this renewal are: at rising or at morning prayers, at Holy Communion, in temptations and trials. Little by little we shall know how to

⁴ *De la parfaite dévotion à la T. S. Vierge*, d'après le Bienheureux Louis Marie de Montfort, troisième édition, No. 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Nos. 256–265.

⁶ *Esprit de notre Fondation* (documents inédits du P. Chaminade en trois tomes), t. I, 127. *Spirit of Our Foundation* (English version), I, paragraph 97.

⁷ Sec E. Neubert: *La Doctrine mariale de M. Chaminade*, in the *Cahiers de la Vierge*, No. 20, Chaps. I, II, III; *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary* (Kirkwood, Mo.: Maryhurst Press).

⁸ *Op. cit.*, No. 119.

multiply these moments. But what is more important than multiplying the number of these renewals is the care to put our whole soul into each one of them.

In the resolutions of Father Schellhorn, a fervent Marianist priest whom God blessed with the gift of the presence of Mary, we read:

General resolution. To try to live my entire consecration, my total belonging to Mary, as consciously as possible in all the details of each day. For this purpose, kneel frequently before the image of Mary at the foot of the cross and renew, with all the fervor of my soul, my entire consecration to her, my total belonging to her, my dependence on her at every instant, my devotedness in her service unto death. Then through her . . . with her . . . in her . . .

) Unite myself and give myself entirely to Jesus, my divine Leader . . .

2) Enter into communion with Him for the welfare of souls.

Insist on this act, performing it as much as possible kneeling before the image of Mary:

1) In the morning, upon rising, formally for the whole day.

2) At the beginning of each spiritual exercise, each canonical hour, each visit to the Blessed Sacrament; formulate each time a special intention and entrust it, with all the general intentions of the morning, through Mary and with Mary, to the Heart of Jesus.

3) At the beginning of each hour of study.

4) Before each course, each act of the holy ministry, etc., place myself with humility and confidence in the hands of Mary as the instrument of Jesus and of his grace.

5) In going to the refectory, in recreation.

) In starting and closing a letter recommend myself together with my correspondent — by a simple glance of the soul or an Ave Maria — to Mary and through her to the Heart of Jesus.

7) Whenever I enter my room, kneel each time before the image of Mary; entrust to her the action or the series of actions just performed as also the souls I have just contacted so that, as a good Mother, she may correct, complete, bless, and fructify my actions by the effusion of the graces of Jesus. Say an Ave for that intention. Insist on this especially in the evening before retiring and include the whole day in my thought; say seven Hail Marys for this intention, for perseverance, and for a holy death.§

§ E. Ncubert, *Un prêtre de Marie, le Père Joseph Schellhorn, Marianiste*, Centre de documentation scolaire, Paris, p. 157.

Notice that, despite their frequency, these renewals do not interrupt the ordinary actions of the day, as they would do if they had been placed at fixed intervals, for instance, every five, ten, or fifteen minutes; these renewals come at moments when the mind is not engaged in a definite occupation. It should be remarked, however, that for a beginner such frequency would become fatiguing. In the beginning it would be good to remember the French proverb: *Qui trop embrasse, mal étreint*; he who reaches for too much, grasps nothing.

PART I

ORDINARY UNION WITH MARY

CHAPTER ONE

Jesus: Our Model

“I have given you an example, that as I have done . . . so you do also.”¹

Our whole work as Christians consists in reproducing Christ in ourselves. “For those whom he has foreknown,” explains St. Paul, “he has also predestined to become conformed to tire image of his Son, that he should be the first-born among many brethren.”² The most perfect Christian is he who succeeds best in reproducing the thoughts, the sentiments, the dispositions of Jesus. “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”³

The duty of imitating Christ extends to all His dispositions. Certainly it extends in a very special way to His dispositions toward His Mother, His dispositions of filial love for the person who is dearer to Him than all the rest of creation.

All filial love implies some degree of union between child and mother. Filial love springs from that union, is nourished by it, delights in it. And as love grows, it in turn strengthens the bonds of union. Is there anything more charming, even more indispensable in the life of a child than this intimate kinship with her who has given him life? The union of a child with its mother begins as a physical union. The child lives within its mother; it feeds, breathes, and grows in her and through her; it is one with her. This mysterious union is for her a source of indescribable happiness. Especially in her first pregnancy, how often does she not think of the baby she carries under her heart! How often she sees it in imagination, pictures its features to herself, foresees its character! How often she speaks to it, repeats her love, assures it of her devotedness, recounts the wonderful

¹jn. 13:15.

²Rom. 8:29.

³Phil. 2:5.

dreams she entertains for its future! Meanwhile her little one is sleeping; for months it is wrapped in such profound slumber that it hears nothing of these words of love, understands nothing of the thousand infinitely sweet things she repeats to it.

But Jesus did not sleep in the womb of His Mother; at least His intellect and His affections did not sleep. His senses were dormant as are those of every child before birth; but from the moment of His conception He enjoyed the use of reason and understood all that His Mother said to Him: the protestations of love and of devotedness which she lavished upon Him, the visions of love, at once joyful and terrifying, which she had concerning Him.

And He responded to His Mother. He did not reply by audible words but by communications a thousand times more comforting than all human utterances. He told her of His love for her, His joy at being her child, His gratitude for receiving His sacred humanity, from her, and from her alone, His special satisfaction at seeing her so eager to enter into His dispositions and to work with Him for the glory of His Father and the salvation of the world. At the same time, acting by His divine power, He penetrated more and more, so to speak, into the soul of Mary and made it always more like His own. Mary understood this silent communication. She felt herself becoming ever more and more like Jesus; far more clearly than Paul, she experienced that she no longer lived, but that Christ lived in her. In return, what could she do but love and thank Him more, humble herself more profoundly, and promise to devote and sacrifice herself entirely for Him? "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit thrills with joy in God my Saviour. For he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid. . . . Behold thy servant; be it done unto me according to thy word."

The physical union between Jesus and Mary ended after nine months, or rather it was transformed. Henceforth, the young mother would nourish her Child, not with her blood, but with her milk; she would carry Him, not in her womb but in her arms, upon her heart. Who can describe the ineffable happiness of the divine Child when He felt His mother press Him lovingly to her virginal heart? He had to suffer from the first days of His earthly existence: in the cold stable of Bethlehem, in the exile to Egypt, in the poor home of Nazareth. But what did it matter? In the arms of Mary He felt

neither cold, nor exile, nor poverty; He was happy, infinitely happy.

A new life had begun for Him; His senses began to furnish Him with acquired knowledge to parallel the supernatural and infused knowledge which He possessed since His conception. Now He saw His mother whom He had known and loved for nine months. There, close to Him, He beheld the pure and lovely face of a woman both virgin and mother, her shining eyes contemplating Him and telling Him in their own way all that her maternal heart felt for Him. And the eyes of the child responded to the eyes of the mother, telling her all that His filial heart felt for her.

A day dawned on which Mary thrilled with a new joy; for the first time Jesus exclaimed: "Mother!" From that happy hour, how many times would she hear Him repeat that name so charged with meaning and love in its childish simplicity!

Soon there were longer loving conversations between mother and Child. What did they say to each other during those thirty years together? There must have been secrets destined for Mary alone, and partly also for Joseph, secrets too profound and too personal to be revealed to the rest of men. Undoubtedly the Son told the mother of His mission and the part she would have in it, in veiled terms of course, for the hour of full manifestation had not yet come. Above all, they must have spoken of the Father, of His love, of His glory, and of His will. And together they prayed. What a joy for mother and Son to pray, one beside the other! They prayed to the Father in heaven that His name be glorified, that His kingdom come, that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that He give them their daily bread. . . .

Between Jesus and Mary all things were in common: thoughts and reactions, joys and sorrows. For all emotions spring ultimately from love, and love in these two was the same, love for the Father and love for men. Even physiologically they were predisposed to have the same tendencies and the same feelings. When Mary was sorrowful, Jesus was equally sorrowful, and for the same reasons. When Jesus rejoiced, Mary rejoiced with Him, and for the same motives. Just as two harps of extreme sensitivity, constructed by the same craftsman from the same wood, with the strings in exact proportion, perfectly tuned, and placed one beside the other, vibrate in unison, so also their hearts vibrated always in unison; the least emotion of the Son found its echo

in the heart of His mother, and reciprocally. Divine harmony, infinitely rapturous, infinitely charming, at times infinitely sad . . .

Jesus and Mary were united in will even more than in thought and feeling. The Son had only one will, namely that of His Father. At the first instant of His Incarnation in the womb of Mary He had declared to His Father: "Behold, I come to do thy will."⁴ At the same moment the Blessed Virgin had expressed the same dispositions: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."⁵

What painful sacrifices this union would entail for both of them — this union of two wills, of the Son and of the mother, in the unique will of the Father. Already in the period of the hidden life, when Jesus was only twelve years old, this will interrupted their external union for the space of three days, at the price of great anguish for the poor mother, and undoubtedly also, of suffering for the heart of the Son. But it was the will of the Father. Having heard the Boy's reply, at once obscure and clear, Mary was silent, satisfied to keep those words in her heart, in order to meditate on them to understand better the designs of an infinitely loving Father.

After this momentary separation their union of will appeared even more manifest. St. Luke records — no doubt he had the remark from Mary herself — that after the episode of the finding of Jesus in the temple, the Boy was subject to His parents. The desires of the mother were the desires of her Son. As Jesus was able to say later concerning His Father, He could, at this period, have said concerning His mother: "My nourishment is to do the will of my mother." Mary was for Him the representative and the interpreter of the Father's will. With what joy He must have received directions from His mother and anticipated her every desire! What happiness for her to observe Him so eager and so glad to execute all her wishes!

It was probably during this hidden life of Jesus that St. Joseph died. His death deprived Mary of the one on whom she had depended during years for counsel and support. No doubt, Jesus strove to console His mother in this bereavement and to replace His foster father in every way. It must have been a new gratification for Him to provide daily bread for her who was so dear to Him; the new intimacy

⁴ Hebr. 10:9.

⁵ Lk. 1:38.

between the two was even sweeter and closer than in the past, especially in the evening after work, and on the sabbath.

Thus passed thirty of the thirty-three years of a life which was planned to bring the message of salvation to the entire world — thirty years given to Mary, as if the rest of the world did not count.

Finally the hour came when they had to separate. It was the Father's will; hence, more sacred to them than all personal consolation.

Jesus appeared among men. He experienced other joys than those of Nazareth. Crowds pressed enthusiastically about Him; they brought their sick to be cured, and their miseries to be consoled; avidly they drank in His teachings and cried: "Blessed the womb that bore thee and the breasts that gave thee nourishment!" They followed Him through the fields, along the seashore, on the mountain, in the desert, forgetting in their fervor to take food, ready, despite the prospect of terrible reprisals from their leaders, to proclaim Him king. The experiences more consoling than this exterior triumph, which He did not desire, were those of publicans who renounced their injustices, public sinners who returned to a life of purity, multitudes of simple and generous souls who gave themselves to Him without reserve. . . . Taken all together, however, the consolations of these three years of public ministry were not equivalent to one hour spent close to His mother.

Actually during this period the separation of Jesus and Mary was only external: in thought the Son was always with the mother, and the mother with the Son. Thought is where love is, and they loved one another immeasurably more than they loved all those whom Jesus was then evangelizing or all those who would come after Him until the end of time. Certain servants of Mary, whose love for her is only a very faint imitation of that of Jesus, attain the degree of unity characterized by constant awareness of the presence of Mary; how, then, could her Son forget her for a single instant? And if some privileged souls constantly enjoy the grace of the presence of Jesus, how could Mary forget Him for even a moment? Jesus thought of Mary when He preached to the multitudes and when He wrought miracles; He thought of her when He was faced with the ignorance of the crowds, the obstinacy of sinners, the opposition of enemies; at least *she* understood, *she* loved Him. He knew that in her solicitude she thought unceasingly of Him, rejoiced in His success, grieved over His dis-

appointments, had no feelings other than His own. He knew also that the prayers and sacrifices which Mary offered uninterruptedly to the Father mysteriously fructified His own work: sinners were converted more easily, generous souls gave themselves more fully, because in the small room of Nazareth Mary prayed to the Father for the success of her Jesus.

When the moment of the supreme sacrifice arrived, Jesus again wanted His mother near Him. How many generations have contemplated with poignant compassion the spectacle of Christ expiring on the cross and of the Mother of Sorrows standing at the foot of the cross! And yet that visible union between the Crucified and His mother was only the image of another more intimate union, which associated Mary not only with the sufferings but also with the very mission of her Son. The Father had sent this Son into the world to redeem humanity; He would accomplish this redemption in concert with His mother; He would be the Redeemer, she the Coredemptrix.

Why this union in sorrow and sacrifice? The redemptive value of the Passion of the Son was infinite. What could the suffering of Mary add to it?

Even if she could add nothing, it would always be a great consolation for the mother to be able to suffer with and for her Son. As a matter of fact, however, the co-operation of Mary could, in a way, add something to the efficacy of the Passion; for Jesus willed that His Passion, infinitely efficacious by right, should be more efficacious in fact, by virtue of the co-operation of Mary; that, by this co-operation, the application of His Passion to men would be more complete.

Then, too, He had decided that His mother should also be our mother. To that end, it was necessary that she give birth to us supernaturally, and it is as Coredemptrix that she has brought us forth.

Further, He had decided that until the end of time she should fulfill in the world a universal, apostolic mission, that no soul should come to Him except through her. For that reason, also, it was necessary that she be associated in the redemption of all souls, since her apostolic mission in the Church would be a direct consequence of her mission as Coredemptrix.

Inevitably, the time came when the Crucified emitted a loud cry and expired. Would that fact, henceforth, mark the separation here below between the Son and the mother? Not completely. He would

rise the third day and, according to a traditional opinion, would appear first to Mary. What joy in this new finding after three days! No doubt He manifested Himself several more times to her in His glorified body. But forty days after His resurrection He returned to His Father.

Even then there was no total separation. Before leaving His disciples, Jesus had instituted His sacrament of love. It was an ineffable consolation for Him to think of all the souls that until the end of time, by this gift of gifts, He would joyfully strengthen and transform into Himself; it was an immeasurably greater consolation to think of her whom, through the very humanity received from her, He would gladden in the midst of her exile, strengthen in His love, and transform more and more into Himself.

In the beginning, the eucharistie banquet took place only on the first day of the week, which thus became the *dies dominica*, the day of the Lord. Nevertheless, we know through St. Luke that at Jerusalem the faithful participated every day in the breaking of the bread.⁶ Was not this a special favor of Jesus to His Mother, who resided at Jerusalem in the house of St. John? Who can describe the joy of these daily visits of Jesus to Mary?

Still another union caused great consolation to Mary during this period of waiting. To certain souls Jesus makes His presence and His action felt even during sleep. In Mary, life of union with God was, from the beginning of her existence, superior to that of any saint even at the last moment of His existence on earth. What was her mystical union with Jesus during her last days? A perfectly intimate and perfectly delightful communion, which neither exterior occupations nor conversations with men were able to interrupt even for a second.

Yet the hour came when this ineffable eucharistie and mystical union no longer sufficed either for Jesus or for Mary. Consumed with desires that her Son had inflamed within her, Mary was drawn toward His eternal embrace. Even that was not sufficient. Their union had begun in a corporal union; it was necessary, therefore, that to share in His beatitude even the body of Mary should be where the body of Jesus was. Henceforth, the union was to be complete, absolute, indissoluble, everlasting. . . .

But it was not a union of selfish inactivity. The human activity of Christ, as that of Mary, changed only in their mode of action. Christ

⁶ Acts 2:42.

continues to act through His humanity, even more in a certain sense than when He was on earth. His action is not limited to a period of three years and to the confines of Judea; it extends to all men and to all time. No grace of any kind is granted to a human being except by the intervention of the humanity of Christ. He remains always our advocate with the Father; He is always our High Priest; He lives always to intercede in our behalf.⁷

Now in this incessant heavenly activity Jesus again wills His mother to be associated with Him. And is it not natural that this be so? With Him she suffered, with Him she shall be honored. He associated Mary with Himself in the work of the Redemption; He shall also associate her in His role of Advocate and Mediator.

If every grace without exception comes *from* Him, every grace without exception comes *through* her. No soul is converted, is sanctified, is saved without the common intervention of Jesus and Mary. Together they will labor until Christ arrives at His plenitude. But even then their activity will not cease. Together they will adore the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit and, to the happiness of the immense family of the redeemed, they will add a particular note of joy because they will always be, in the midst of that family, the elder Brother and the beloved mother, who merited that the family should be forever in the company of the Father.

Vaguely glimpsed and awkwardly sketched with poor human words, such is the union which Jesus willed to contract with His mother. A marvelous union from the first instant of her conception, and destined to become, without interruption, without mitigation, more marvelous at every instant. It is a union without parallel, of which no union among creatures can give us an adequate idea, neither the union of a child with its mother, nor that of a spouse with his beloved, nor that of a friend with a friend. It is a union surpassed only by that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. It is a union between two persons having only one thought, one love, one will, one mission and, as it were, one soul. The love of Jesus so willed it.

Now, Jesus has given us the example that we do as He did. . . .

⁷ Hebr. 7:25.

Union of Thought

CHAPTER TWO

Union With Mary in Prayers Addressed to Her

The first means of uniting ourselves with Mary is evidently by speaking to her in prayer.

Certain formulas of prayer to the Blessed Virgin are demanded daily of every dutiful Catholic; the *Hail Mary* in the morning and night prayers; the *Angelas*, at the beginning, middle, and end of each day; the *Rosary*, or at least a decade of the beads; and, for all who understand apostolic filial piety, the *Act of Consecration* to Mary and the *Three O'Clocks Prayer*.¹

The recitation of the *Memorare* is also a practice held in honor among servants of Mary; and there is a growing vogue for the recitation of the *Three Hail Marys* upon rising to obtain through the Immaculate Virgin the grace of purity during the day, and again at retiring, for the grace of keeping pure during the night.

A great number of Marian souls have made it a rule to say a *Hail Mary*, or at least the first two words of the prayer, each time the clock strikes.¹ Some religious have the custom of reciting a short prayer every time they enter or leave their cells. The Passionists, for example, say a *Hail Mary*; certain Dominican Sisters say the *Sub Tuum*, *We Fly to Thy Patronage*. In the first rule of the Marianists, Father Chaminade included the following article: "Every hour during the day and when awakening during the night, the religious will say: May the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary."³

Other invocations serve equally well to strengthen the union between

¹ See the supplement of *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary*.

² St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother sought permission from his superiors to be awakened by his guardian angel for this purpose every hour of the night.

³ S.F., I, 165.

the soul and its heavenly Mother. This is particularly true of the ejaculatory prayers that each one chooses according to his tastes and needs and repeats from time to time during the day in going to and fro, before and after and even during his actions.

To these relatively short practices, religious of various orders and even devout Christians in the world add the recitation of some Office of the Blessed Virgin: the "Great Office," the Little Office *de Beata*, the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, the Office of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, etc.

Mention might also be made here of the custom of chanting the *Salve Regina* at the end of the day by the Cistercians, or before morning prayers and after night prayers by the Little Brothers of Mary, the *Inviolata* by the Dominicans, etc.

St. Alphonsus Liguori and Father Chaminade recommended *Visits to the Blessed Virgin* in churches, chapels, and before altars dedicated to her in order to offer veneration, love, and petitions, and to expect confidently graces from heaven at such places.

It is related that certain servants of Mary passed their days fingering the beads to the point where their fingers became callous; others moved their lips to form the words of the *Ave* even during sleep.

Remember, "take only what fits you"!

It is not, however, the number of prayers addressed to the Blessed Virgin that counts with her, but rather the fervor that we put into them. One *Hail Mary* recited with love unites us more closely to her than fifty recited mechanically. It would be useless to repeat this truism if a natural tendency to reduce actions which are most supernatural in their origin to a kind of routine did not endanger our perspective. There are some people who have the habit of reciting the Rosary daily who would not dare fall asleep in peace at the end of a fatiguing day if they had not finished their five decades; but these same people will sleep the sleep of the blessed after their rosary even if they were distracted from the first to the last of the fifty *Aves*.

It is true that we must not neglect such pious practices because they require a little additional effort. If they become too encumbering, however, we must ask the Blessed Virgin whether we should say all, abridge, or suppress them. The Blessed Virgin is a good Mother and if sometimes she is very exacting in the face of duty, she is also human

enough not to demand what would, at a given moment, be an obstacle to our health or to the accomplishment of a duty of state. The important thing is not to grant ourselves dispensations and exemptions without asking her what course to follow.

There are several methods of saying these prayers which serve to unite ourselves to the Blessed Virgin. One such method is to place ourselves in the presence of her to whom we wish to speak. Another is to unite ourselves to Jesus in order to speak to His mother. There will be question of these two methods later in special chapters. It is helpful also to reflect on the ideas and sentiments which these prayers suggest at times other than when we are reciting them.

Another aid is to recall the end proposed in these prayers. Perhaps our purpose is to praise Mary, to express love and gratitude to her. The very formula of the prayer generally recalls its purpose; we need, then, merely pay attention to the formula.

We may also have the intention of obtaining favors for ourselves or for others. Undoubtedly, in this valley of tears, most of our prayers are prayers of petition. Is this not the case even with the majority of prayers in the sacred liturgy? Now often, when we recite prayers of petition, we do not actually ask anything, and we do not ask for anything because we do not feel the need of asking. With most of us it is due probably to spiritual indifference or laziness; sometimes also it may be some prejudice against the prayer of petition, as if it implied supernatural selfishness.

To overcome this laziness or to remove our fears of selfishness, it suffices to ask according to the intentions of Mary. Once a girl was asked how she spent the month of May. She replied: "I prayed often *for* the Blessed Virgin." We are apt to smile at such naïveté. Yet there is a very orthodox manner of praying for the Blessed Virgin; it consists in praying according to the intentions of Mary.

Mary proposes a double end in our regard. First, she wishes to take our education in hand in order to form us to the likeness of her Son. Praying that her intentions for our spiritual life be realized — the destruction of obstacles to the life of Jesus in us and the grace to think, to feel, to will, and to act like Him — is not selfishness. On the contrary, it is the desire to give Jesus and Mary the greatest joy we can procure for them, namely, through Mary and for Mary to become another Christ.

Second, the Blessed Virgin wishes to make use of us to further her apostolic mission. We help her by praying for others. To invoke her in their favor causes her ineffable joy, for it permits her to save her wayward children and to bring them back to her Son.

When we formulate our intentions for ourselves and for others at the beginning of our prayers, let us remind our Mother that our intentions are her intentions. Then we shall pray with special fervor because her intentions will be dearer to us than our own. We shall pray also with more confidence and enthusiasm, certain that the desires of Mary will be infallibly fulfilled because they are always conformable to the desires of her Son.

Since all our activity and all our merit belong to Mary in virtue of the total donation we have made of ourselves to her by our act of consecration, and since Mary knows much better than we our own needs and those of others, it might seem that we should be content to pray simply according to the intentions of our Mother without bothering to formulate personal intentions.

At times it is praiseworthy to act in this way. Some priests have the pious habit of offering the Holy Sacrifice according to the intentions of Mary. That shows great confidence in their mother and abandonment to her will. Sometimes on Saturdays, on Marian feasts, or when we have no urgent personal intention, we can cause her happiness by offering Mass, Holy Communion, or prayers accompanied by sacrifices according to her intentions. Concerned as she is with the needs of all her children, Mary most assuredly has intentions that are always very precise and very urgent.

But is it always more perfect to act in this way? We are safe in believing that as a general rule Mary prefers that we formulate personal intentions in our prayers. She wishes to use us not as machines but as persons endowed with intelligence and initiative. We may justifiably suppose that she desires to see us concerned about our spiritual interests and about the interests of souls placed in our path by Providence, and that our intentions regarding these interests coincide with hers. Would St. Monica have been more pleasing to God if, instead of praying for the conversion of her son, she had prayed according to the general intentions of God?

Moreover, we pray with much more fervor for a need immediately noticed in ourselves or in those around us than for the needs of man-

kind in general; consequently, we place more efficacious prayers at the disposition of the Blessed Virgin.

We must, however, always subordinate our personal intentions to those of Mary. We should pray for the acquisition of a given virtue, for a certain victory, for the sanctification of a particular soul, or “for thy intentions if mine do not agree with thine.”

CHAPTER THREE

Invocation of the Names of Jesus and Mary

THE mother of Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus left us this glimpse of the early life of her saintly daughter: "The little darling does not want to leave me. . . . She will not go up the stairs alone without calling at each step, 'Mother, Mother!' As many times 'Mother' as there are steps." Is this not the way, more or less, with all children? A hundred times a day they call, "Mother, Mother!" They do not tire repeating it, nor do mothers grow tired of hearing that sweet name. Should it not be the same with us in regard to our heavenly Mother?

Of all prayers to the Blessed Virgin the shortest and, in a certain sense, the most perfect is the invocation of the name of Mary — or its equivalent, "Mother," according to the preferences of each one. Its repetition is wonderfully efficacious for arriving at union with her.

In order, however, not to separate what God has united and in order to give to the name of Mary its full meaning and fecundity, we should add the name Jesus whenever we invoke the name of Mary.

These holy names may take on a long litany of meanings, depending on our state of soul and on our needs of the moment. "Mary!" sometimes means "I love you, Mother!" Sometimes it means "Help me," or "Thanks," or "For you," or "In your name"; at other times, "I am sorrowful, console me," or "I have sinned, obtain pardon of Jesus for me," and so on.

"Jesus!" may mean "I love You," or "Come to me," or "Have pity," or "Pardon me," or "I have confidence in You," or "Give me Your love for Your mother," and so forth.

Just as these invocations are wider than all others in the range of their meaning, so are they also superior in their intensity. When in a moment of joy, or especially in a moment of danger, the child cries "Mother!" it puts into that name its whole soul and even its whole

body. Into this cry, as it throws itself toward its mother, its whole being is concentrated.

Besides, this practice is not exposed to the inconveniences of other pious practices. The holiest formulas by their very repetition risk becoming monotonous; they lose their meaning. The names "Jesus" and "Mary," however, never become monotonous or devoid of meaning, for they always express something new, namely, the state of the soul at the time they are uttered, a state which varies unceasingly.

In moments of darkness or of weakness, to recite even a Hail Mary becomes difficult. Would it be difficult, though, to cry: "Jesus" or "My Mother"? When we find ourselves so weary, so miserable, so devoid of thought and feeling that any formula of prayer seems hypocritical and burdensome, have we not then especially most need to cry out: "Mary, my Mother," or "Jesus, Jesus"?

During absorbing occupations we cannot interrupt ourselves for the recitation of an Ave or even an ejaculatory prayer. What prevents us, however, from uttering, at least mentally, "Jesus" or "Mary" in the midst of a reading, a study course, a conversation, even a meal, or during the night in moments of sleeplessness?

The prolonged recitation of vocal prayers becomes wearisome, but these two names, pronounced slowly and with as much love as possible, will relax and soothe the soul, even in moments of exhaustion and of sickness. Some persons have even experienced that the soothing effect of these names and the relaxing rhythm of their repetition swiftly induces wholesome sleep.

All this gives us merely a glimpse of the advantages of invoking the holy names. Later we shall have occasion to show how this little practice aids the soul to recollect itself and to establish itself in peace; how it helps to recite vocal prayers with attention and love, to assist at Holy Mass, to prepare for Holy Communion, to occupy to advantage the time of thanksgiving, and to sanctify all occupations, even the most lowly.

The repetition of the names of Jesus and Mary can even replace certain spiritual exercises when it is impossible to perform them in the usual way. The purpose of these exercises is to establish confident and loving contact between the soul and God; certainly repeating the names of Jesus and Mary establishes this contact easily and perfectly. If we are pressed for time, we will say better morning or

night prayers by repeating "Jesus, Mary" slowly and lovingly several times, than by reciting hastily all the formulas of our prayer book. During meditation, in moments of dryness, we will be able to make an excellent mental prayer by repeating with humility and confidence the names "Jesus" and "Mary." Certain souls do nothing else during mystical prayer.

This is not to suggest that these names should be repeated in the rhythm of a litany. They must be pronounced slowly, so that we are able to put into them our whole soul—all that we think, all that we feel, all that we desire at the moment of pronouncing them. The repetition of these names should help us penetrate to the very soul of Christ and of His Mother, and to feel their embrace, so to speak, or at least their intensely loving regard. By thoughtfully repeating these names several times, allowing a short interval between invocations, the soul more easily experiences a living and vivifying contact with Jesus and Mary.

In order to acquire this habit of repeating the names of Jesus and Mary, we must begin gradually, multiplying occasions from time to time. We should take care, however, not to count the number of times we pronounce them in the course of a day. If we do, we shall be tempted to repeat them rapidly, whereas they produce their marvelous effects only when uttered slowly.

Perhaps the best time to begin this practice would be during mental prayer. Later we might try to pronounce these names when rising and retiring and during occupations which require little concentration. Other occasions for repeating them would be when we catch ourselves daydreaming, or when we wish to recollect ourselves.

Then we should endeavor to pronounce these names before each spiritual exercise and even before each occupation. Eventually, we shall succeed in repeating them frequently during the course of the same occupations, at a natural break in our work, or when we pause momentarily to catch our breath.

With perseverance and love we shall finally succeed in repeating these names, at least *mentally*, very often during our work—at each page we read, at each paragraph we write, at almost each movement we make. For the soul aware that it is a child of Mary, after the example of Jesus, will say "Mother, Mother" at each step, as many times "Mother" as there are steps.

CHAPTER FOUR

Loving Mary With the Heart of Jesus and Jesus With the Heart of Mary

In order to give true meaning to our prayers to Mary, we must understand the exact nature of our devotion to her. In an earlier book, *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary*, I attempted to show that perfect devotion to Mary is the reproduction of the filial love of Jesus for His Mother.¹ In Chapter V of Book I of that work I picture Jesus speaking these words to a faithful soul:

My brother, since my life is your life, and my Mother is your Mother, it is easy for you to imitate my filial love for her.

But you should not imitate me only as a disciple imitates his master, or as a Christian on earth imitates his celestial patron. I am more than a model placed before you; I am, for you, an interior principle of life.

You live by me. My dispositions must become your dispositions.

I am the vine, you are a branch. The same sap circulates in the stock of the vine as in the branches.

I am the head, you are a member of my Mystical Body; the selfsame blood flows in the head and in the members.

When you are pure, it is I who am pure in you; when you are patient, it is I who am patient in you; when you practice charity, it is I who practice charity in you. You live; it is no longer you who live, it is I who live in you. You love my Mother; no, it is no longer you who love her, it is I who love her in you.

Do you understand now why you are so happy in loving Mary? It is I in you who am happy in loving her.

If this relationship between Jesus and the soul is a reality, it becomes clear that when we address Mary it is important that we are con-

¹ *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary*, Part I, the Ideal, Chapter III.

scious of doing so in the name of Jesus — that we are aware that it is Jesus in us who loves, who praises, who thanks His mother.

There are different means of intensifying this consciousness. One is to meditate on the reasons why Jesus loves His mother.² Another is to preface the recitation of rather long prayers addressed to the Blessed Mother such as the rosary, the litany, her office, with an invitation to Jesus, Son of Mary, to take possession of us in order to praise, love, admire, and thank His mother. Before short prayers it is sufficient to say “Jesus,” meaning by this invocation, “Come, speak to Your mother through me.”

Instead of reciting alone, in our own name, “Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, Mother most amiable, Mother most admirable . . . Pray for us,” we must be two, Jesus and I, addressing these invocations to Mary. In this identification of ourselves with Jesus, we will experience more fervor, love, confidence, even greater satisfaction, and will give to Mary — we, Jesus and I, will give her — immeasurably more happiness. And at the same time we will be most pleasing to Jesus. St. Paul makes a statement which at first sight seems strange: “What is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, I fill up in my flesh.”³ Now nothing, certainly, was lacking in the sufferings of Christ on the part of the person of Christ, but something was lacking on the part of Paul, member of the Body of Christ. It is our duty to fill ourselves as much as possible with Christ until He is completely formed in us. We endeavor to become humble, patient, charitable; but is this not an effort to fill up in ourselves that which we lack of the humility, patience, and charity of Christ? And when we practice devotion to Mary, do we not fill up in us what is lacking of His filial love? By uniting ourselves to Jesus when praying to Mary, we help Him love His Mother; we are for Him a “supplementary humanity” in the exercise of His filial love for her who is so much more dear to Him than all other creatures. What great joy we may thus give Him!

If it is Jesus in us who loves Mary, is it also possible that it is Mary in us who loves Jesus? Obviously Mary does not live in us as Jesus does, for Jesus lives in us by His divinity. Still, if Mary does not actually live in us, she does act in us. Certainly she acts in us by the graces which she obtains for us, the graces of light and strength

² See *My Ideal*, Part II, Chapter II; Part III, Chapter I.

³ Col. 1:24.

which make us live the life of Christ. Most probably she also acts in us by direct operation—as we shall see in the second part of this book.

If we have consecrated ourselves entirely to her, it is precisely to allow her to act freely in us according to her designs. Now the designs of Mary are entirely concerned with Jesus—Jesus in Himself, Jesus living in each one of us, Jesus desirous of living in all men. She wishes to use the activity which we have consecrated to her in order to love, thank, and glorify her Son more and more; to make Him live more fully in each of us; to have Him born and live in all men whose mother she became on Calvary. Later we will consider the last two of these points. As for the first, it is evident that Mary is eager to see each of us united to her in order that through us she may love, thank, and glorify her Son.

Just as our awareness of loving Mary in the name of Jesus obtains an increase of joy for Jesus, for Mary, and for us, so also our awareness that Mary unites herself to us in order to love Jesus increases her joy, the joy of Jesus, and our own.

Mary rejoices because we are a “supplementary humanity” with which to love and thank her Son. Jesus rejoices because in our voice He hears the voice of His mother. We rejoice, for it is with an altogether different sentiment that we say: “Jesus, our God; Jesus, our refuge; Jesus, meek and humble of heart, have mercy on us,” according as we pray in our own name or with the certitude that Mary prays with us and through us.

For very interior Marian souls, for those especially who enjoy the gift of the presence of Mary, the habit of uniting with Jesus to speak to her, and of uniting with Mary to speak to Him, has become almost a necessity. They would feel strange to speak to one without doing so in the name of the other. St. John Eudes used the expression: “to love Jesus with the heart of Mary and to love Mary with the heart of Jesus.” This expression is readily found, under some other form, on the lips of other Marian souls. Already five centuries before St. John Eudes, St. Anselm had composed the following prayer: “O good Jesus, by the love with which Thou lovest Thy Mother grant me, I pray Thee, that I may love her truly, just as Thou lovest her truly and desirest her to be loved. O good Mother, by the love with which thou lovest thy Son and desirest Him to be loved, obtain for

me the grace, I pray thee, to love Him truly as thou truly lovest Him and desirest Him to be loved.”⁴

The doctrine of the present chapter helps us appreciate more the excellence of the practice explained in the preceding chapter on the invocation of the names of Jesus and Mary. When we say “Mary” we put into this cry not only all that our soul feels for her, but also and more especially all that the soul of Jesus feels for His mother. When we say “Jesus” it is Mary who, through us, prays and loves her Son; and we then experience something of the confidence and love which she puts into this name uttered by our lips.

«P. L., CLIX, col. 959.

CHAPTER FIVE

Recalling Mary

In addition to prayers, many devotees of the Blessed Virgin use material objects to recall the thought of her. We have seen how St. John Eudes would often kiss the medal of Mary. St. Leonard of Port Maurice wore a medal of the Madonna on his breast, on occasion pressing it to his heart or placing it before him. As a small boy, the future Curé of Ars always carried with him, even to bed, a little statue of Mary. St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother nourished his piety by fixing his attention on pictures and statues of his heavenly "Mamma." Father Poppe made a daily pilgrimage to a Lourdes grotto and left a flower which should replace him when he had gone. The Carmelite, Michael of St. Augustine, spiritual director of the Marian mystic, Mary of St. Theresa, always carried upon his person the picture of the Virgin by St. Luke and placed it before him everywhere, hardly ever taking his eyes from it. He pressed it between his hands when he prepared for confession or when someone sought his counsel. He often bowed his head toward the picture to converse with the Blessed Virgin, and he placed it near him during sleep. As soon as he was named provincial, he was influential in having the chapter pass a statute requiring his religious to begin all their writings with the name of Mary and prescribing that this name be placed above the doors of all the sleeping rooms and elsewhere in the convent.¹ The Rule of the Mercedarians contains the following prescription: "The Brothers will always have in their cells and in their rooms an image of the Blessed Virgin. On entering and on leaving they will greet it with heart and lips as becomes servants and sons." Brother Leonard loved to have a picture of Mary before him during prayers and meditation; during his other employments he made it a rule to glance at her picture every five minutes, an obligation of which his spiritual direc-

¹ *Introduction a la Vida Interna y Practica Frutiva de la Vida Mistica*, by P. Miguel de San Augustin, pp. 26-28.

tor later relieved him. When opening a door he would step aside a moment to let the Blessed Virgin pass.² He kept an empty chair near him for her. In the refectory he imagined her seated opposite him reminding him from time to time of some mortification.³ For some, the striking of the hour serves as a reminder to recollect themselves for a moment in the presence of their Mother; for others, the melody of the *Ave Maris Stella*, played hourly by the clock, recalls the thought of the Blessed Virgin.

These methods of recalling Mary may easily become mere mechanical movements unless we are careful to make our renewals deliberately, and occasionally to stop a moment before making them, in order really to enter into living and loving contact with the Blessed Virgin. Father Poppe often counseled those he directed to ask Mary's blessing by using the well-known formula: *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria* (May the Blessed Virgin with her dear Son bless us!). "Wait an instant," he would add, "Mary will bless you. Then make the sign of the cross."

Brother Leonard had certainly learned to *realize* the presence of Mary when he looked at her pictures. A priest, speaking of a visit to him, wrote:

When I entered his cell, half-darkened by the drawn shades, I had the impression I was entering a sanctuary. The dignity of the sick Brother, his modesty, his affability told me at once that I was in the presence of a saint.

It did not take me long to notice that this was a Marian saint.

On the wall was a picture of Our Lady of Grace. Brother frequently turned his head slightly and cast at the divine Mother a glance that I can only describe as passionate and burning with love.

I never saw a person look at the Blessed Virgin with such eyes.⁴

The name of Mary, pronounced in a thoughtful manner that bespeaks love and confidence, whether it be said orally or mentally, is a powerful aid in maintaining and increasing virtue.

Above all, we should aim at making use of the natural ties that exist between our daily work and the presence of Mary in order to recall her nearness to us. This method is superior to any artificial means we might use to help us recall her presence. In a future chapter we shall see what these natural ties are.

² *Op. cit.*, 275, 315.

³ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

CHAPTER SIX

The Presence of Mary

In order to speak to the Blessed Virgin and to live in union with her, it is necessary to feel that in some way we are in her presence.

Physical presence requires nearness in space. In the moral order, however, presence involves rather the possibility of direct interaction between persons. We feel that we are in the presence of a person when we are aware that he sees us, hears us, notices our condition, is able to reply to us and to act upon us. The more perfectly these conditions are realized, the more completely is there a real moral presence. Whoever loves Mary will certainly desire her presence in the most real and complete manner possible.

We know through faith that the blessed in heaven, in contemplating God, see us with our needs and our prayers, and that they can assist us by interceding with God in our behalf. This is the foundation of the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints. Indirectly, then, in the beatific vision, the saints see us and know us in so far as God judges it proper to enlighten them. In like manner, it is indirectly through the beatific vision that the Blessed Virgin is present to us, sees us, and sends us unceasingly the graces that we receive. Although this presence is indirect, it is nevertheless incomparably more perfect than that which exists between the closest friends in the warmest and most personal, heart-to-heart exchange of confidences.

Probably Mary is present to us in still another way by a direct, physical presence. The opinion of most theologians, of Thomists in particular, is that the glorified humanity of Jesus exercises a physical action upon us. Now according to the principle of analogy between the privileges of Jesus and those of Mary, all the activities exercised by the humanity of Jesus which are not required by the hypostatic union are shared with Mary, in as far as they are befitting a pure

creature and a woman.¹ We may expect, then, that the glorified humanity of Mary exercises an analogous physical action upon us. Moreover, the reason for this action is the same in both cases: Jesus acts on us to apply the grace which He has merited for us by the Redemption; Mary co-operated with Jesus, and in dependence upon Him, in the acquisition of this same grace. Since, by reason of this co-operation with Christ the Redeemer, she has become the Distributrix of all graces, it is quite natural that she, like Him, exercises upon us a physical action as well as the moral action of impetration.

In his encyclical letter *Ad Caeli Reginam*, October 11, 1954, on the royalty of Mary, Pope Pius XII confirmed this doctrine. He wrote:

The Blessed Virgin has not only received the grace of excellence and perfection which is supreme after that of Christ Himself, but has also received some sharing of that efficacy by which her Son and our Redeemer is rightly and properly said to reign over the minds and wills of men. For if the Word of God performs miracles and gives grace through the Humanity He has assumed, if He employs the sacraments and His saints as instruments for the salvation of souls, why should He not use His Mother's Office and efforts to bring us the fruits of the Redemption?²

An analysis of Mary's condition in heaven seems also to support the belief that she is able to exercise a physical action upon us.

In our earthly condition, with our mortal bodies, we can perceive persons and objects placed at a certain distance, and we can act upon them. By three of our senses — sight, hearing, and smell — we can perceive them; by our looks and our voice we can act upon them. Besides this normal action there are others, such as telepathy, radiesthesia, and hypnotism — actions still surrounded by mystery, yet natural and certain. And it is possible that still others may be discovered.

Spirits not bound to bodies do not have their field of action limited by the laws of space. Scripture and tradition show us evil spirits exercising their action on the various faculties and activities of the soul and even on the body of man. With all the more reason it befits good spirits to act in this way.

Departed souls, however, cannot exercise a similar action except

¹ *Mary in Doctrine*, p. 33.

² Quoted from *Ecclesiastical Review*, Dec., 1954, Vol. CXXXI, No. 6, p. 414.

with special assistance from God, for the soul does not naturally exercise physical or spiritual action outside of itself except through the intermediary of its body. But the soul of Mary is united to her body, and her body enjoys, certainly in the highest degree, the qualities of risen bodies. Such bodies are perfect instruments for direct action upon the children of earth. And as this action in Mary is a maternal action, it is inconceivably superior to that which the most perfect spirit could exercise. The action of a mother is undoubtedly the action of a very loving soul; and it is by the action of her body as well as of her soul that she expresses her maternal tenderness for her child, sympathizing with him, laughing with him, consoling him, encouraging him, helping him in his trials and his difficulties, in a word, being to him the most tender of mothers.³

We have seen that in the beatific vision and through the natural faculties of her glorified body Mary knows us, sees our needs, and hears our prayers. We have seen also that in virtue of her intercession and even by direct physical actions she assists us. Surely we can say, then, that the events of our life happen as if she were quite near to us. We are certainly closer to the reality if we represent our heavenly mother before us or at our side, though hidden from our eyes, than if we imagine her in a heaven infinitely far beyond the stars. Those who love to remember her by glancing at her picture or statue are right in addressing her as if she were at the place where the picture hangs or the statue stands. In venerating and kissing these objects they are conscious of performing an act of love, not of superstition, just as the child who happily beholds and kisses a picture of his mother knows that he is honoring and loving not a piece of paper, but the person who is dearest to him in the world. Clients of the Blessed Virgin have even more reason to act in this way because Mary sees them, hears them, helps them as if she actually stands very close to them, whereas the portrait of a mother cannot bring the mother to the child no matter how much it manifests its affection for her.

The manner of living in the presence of Mary must necessarily

³ On the physical action of the Blessed Virgin in the soul, interesting explanations may be found in *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, by Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., 234-248, Herder, 1941. Further on we shall see that the experience of mystical souls confirms this theory of the physical action of Mary on souls.

vary with the character and the experience of each individual. Let us consider two different cases.

A person with a rather vivid imagination writes:

For some time I have experienced great joy in living in the presence of Mary. Whether I pray, play, or work, I see her image before me almost all the time. She is all beautiful, all pure. She looks at me, she smiles. I speak to her and feel immensely happy. Do not all persons who live in the presence of Mary see her, as I do, very close to them, looking at them?

A person of little imagination writes:

Formerly I would place a beautiful picture of the Blessed Virgin on my desk and from time to time I would look at it to renew myself in the thought of my Mother in heaven. This helped me for a while, but soon left me rather cold. Then I would replace this picture with another, but after a time this one, too, lost its power of recall. After all, these pictures, even the most artistic of them, were so poor in comparison with the beauty which must have adorned the real Virgin.

At present, I think periodically of Mary by pronouncing her name. I am like a child who under the eyes of its mother accomplishes the work she has asked of me. Often the child raises its eyes toward her to testify to the joy there is in being able to serve her; then it continues its work under the spell of that joy and of the presence of its mother. Between that child and me there is, however, a difference. To look at Mary I do not have to detach my eyes from my work; by an interior glance that says "Mary," I encounter the loving glance of my mother. Instead of halting my work, this helps me to accomplish it with the greatest perfection possible because I put my whole soul into it.

Sometimes, in moments of dryness, I am like a poor, blind and deaf child who knows that its mother is very close, for it feels the touch of her hand. From time to time I say to her, "Mother!" Even if I do not hear her, she hears me.

Before prayers and actions of some duration, it is good to stop for a moment to make an act of faith in the presence of Mary, saying to her, for instance: "My Mother, I believe that you see me, you hear me, you love me, you aid me. I belong entirely to you." In the course of the action the word "Mary" will suffice to replace us in that initial disposition. Before actions of short duration it will be enough to say "My Mother!" We understand; she understands.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Communion With the Soul of Mary

St. Louis Mary de Montfort, while explaining the marvelous effects which perfect devotion to Mary produces in souls, cites as fifth effect the communication of the soul and spirit of Mary. "The soul of the Blessed Virgin," he writes, "is communicated to you to glorify the Lord; her spirit will replace yours to enjoy God." He also quotes St. Ambrose: "May the soul of Mary be in each one of you to glorify the Lord; may the spirit of Mary be in each one of you to exult in God."¹

In the biography of Father Nazario Perez (1877–1952), who was the most important director of Mother Angela Sorazu, the great Marian mystic of the twentieth century, and who was himself very advanced in the life of union with Mary, a practice of devotion called "Marian Communion" is mentioned which he learned from his spiritual daughter.¹ This was evidently, as his biographer explains, an act of intimate union with the Blessed Virgin, which consisted in asking her to come to take possession of his whole being, body and soul, already consecrated to her, and to replace his own life by her life.

Father Poppe doubtlessly means the same thing when he speaks of "absorbing Mary." He explains:

Absorbing Mary means to draw all her thoughts into our mind, her sentiments into our heart, her strength into our will, her spirit into our whole being.³

¹ *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, No. 217.

² *La Vida sobrenatural*, 1953, p. 145.

³ *Une âme d'apôtre*, M. Edouard Poppe, Prêtre, by O. D. Jacobs and Ed. Ned, p. 176. The expression "Marian aspiration," though rather vague, is less ambiguous than "Marian Communion."

These Marian souls certainly have not been the first to follow this practice. Others have done so without ever having heard of it.

To communicate with Mary is evidently not the same as receiving Jesus in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we communicate directly with the body of Christ, and through the body with His soul and His divinity. Here there is question of communicating with the soul of Mary, with her soul in general or with a special disposition of her soul, as her humility, purity, confidence, etc. But there is no question here of a simple invocation of Mary as, "Grant me your humility, your purity. . . ." There is a contact of Mary's soul with our own to pass on one of her dispositions. We are expected to look interiorly at Mary's disposition, if need be, recalling some scene of the Gospels, and to ask her to make that mood enter into our soul. Besides, especially if you live intimately with Mary, you immediately understand her way of thinking, feeling, and willing. Intimate friendship with a person whom we esteem and love begets in us, even unconsciously, by a certain sympathy, his thoughts, feelings, desires, and sometimes even his gestures. In close friendship with Mary, in addition to a spiritualized sympathy, there is a grace which helps bring about that transfusion of dispositions from Mary's soul to ours. In mystical souls there is even another factor.

Thus according to the needs of our souls we pray her to come to us with her purity if we are tempted; with her courage if we are low in spirits; with her confidence when we pray; with her patience in our trials; with her joy when we are elated; with her strength when we are weak. Above all, when we speak to Jesus, we want her to come to us with her love for Him.

If this practice becomes habitual, it gradually transforms our soul into a completely Marian soul which will live in unison with the soul of our heavenly Mother. She establishes it in a habitual condition of fresh vigor, harmony, and peace; above all, in a disposition of love and intimacy in our relations with Jesus.

We shall have to come back to this matter repeatedly in the chapters ahead. For the present, "Take only what applies to you."

Union of Will

CHAPTER EIGHT

Importance of This Union

There are many souls, pious but still little advanced in the spiritual life, who are instinctively drawn to seek perfection of union with Mary in continuous thought of her. Without doubt, continuous thought of Mary would contribute to the perfection of our union with her: the more we think of the Blessed Virgin, the more we shall love her and the better we shall work for her. In heaven we shall contemplate our well-beloved mother without ceasing, and even on earth certain great Marian servants have reached a state in which they have never lost the thought of her.

Perfection of union with Mary, however, is not so much a matter of intellect as of will. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," declares Christ, "but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven."¹ And it is not they who say, "Mother, Mother," who cause the greatest joy to Mary, but they who do her will. Love consists not in thinking always of someone, but rather in willing and not willing the same things as the loved one. Christ proved His love for His Father less by keeping His mind turned always toward Him than by telling Him, at His entrance into the world: "Behold, I come to do thy will, O God,"² and by protesting before leaving the world: "Not my will but thine be done."³ Thus He prepared the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world. It was by her *fiat* at Gabriel's visit that Mary gave the Son of God to humanity, and by her *fiat* at the foot of the cross that she contributed to our redemption.

A certain self-seeking easily insinuates itself into our desire for

¹ Mt. 7:21.

² Hebr. 10:7.

³ Lk. 22:42.

union of thought, that is, the consolation we find in thinking of our heavenly mother. In the union of our will with hers, however, there is consolation for Mary. There may be more pleasure for a son to remain at home beside His mother than to go into the fields or the factory to work for her. And yet, which of the two loves his mother better, the son who seeks his own personal pleasure at his mother's side, or the one who goes away to cause her pleasure?

Union of our will with that of Mary, the most perfect of unions, is also the one which is always possible. There are periods in which constancy in the thought of Mary is impossible — times of great fatigue, of nervous headache, of sickness, temptation, tension, and confusion — but what prevents the soul from uniting its will with that of Mary in these moments? Is it not precisely in these moments, when union of thought is practically impossible, that union of will causes most joy to Mary? Moreover, as we shall see later, a loving will produces union of thought spontaneously, and the constancy of that will assures constancy of thought much better than all direct effort to think continuously of Mary.

CHAPTER NINE

The Practice of Union of Will

Union of will with Mary requires conformity of our will with hers in all things. But how do we know her will in our regard? We know it, above all, through our duties of state. Duties of state are for each of us the expression of the will of God; they are, therefore, also an expression of the will of Mary. There can be no suppression of obligatory tasks in order to work at those of our own choice, even though they be the recitation of prayers or the performance of works of zeal. Nor can there be any thought of doing first what pleases us and postponing the accomplishment of daily duties. Before attempting to please the Blessed Virgin by extra works, we must please her by fidelity to our obligatory actions.

Nor should we do our daily tasks merely as an obligation of conscience, reserving enthusiasm for works of personal initiative. We must put our whole soul into the performance of daily duties because we must put our whole soul into the accomplishment of God's will. Can we imagine the Blessed Virgin acquitting herself negligently of any of her humble tasks? She characterizes herself and all her conduct in her response to Gabriel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." The will of God is infinitely lovable anywhere and everywhere, whether it leads us to prostrate ourselves before the Blessed Sacrament or to sweep a stairway.

Not every moment of our day is taken up by duties of state. For most men, strictly obligatory duties require only a part of their time. Even in the most active lives there are free moments in which no duty of state imposes a precise task.

Would a person entirely consecrated to Mary be free to undertake any occupation he might wish during these free moments? From the viewpoint of strict obligation, yes. From the viewpoint of total

donation to the Blessed Virgin, no. At the moment of total consecration he did not say: "I give you my body and my soul; all that I am, all that I have, all that I do, all—except my free time." Yet certain pious souls become sulky and even protest, as soon as they are asked to sacrifice a part of the time which they had counted upon for some occupation of their choice. Nature takes such subtle revenge. It seems to submit humbly in solemn moments when we profess to immolate it entirely to the cause of Jesus and Mary, but later it is ingenious in finding compensations to which it firmly attaches itself as to sacred rights. With most of us, donation of self is not really complete; that is why there are many fervent souls but few saints.

Even in the employment of leisure time, we must remain united in will with the will of Mary. How shall we know this will? Ordinarily the answer is not difficult. Everywhere and always Mary wills that we give ourselves over to loving Jesus and to having Him loved. Circumstances generally indicate by what occupations we can best attain this end. In order to discern what she desires of us, it suffices to ask: "Mother, what must I do to love Jesus and make Him loved?"

There are circumstances in which it is more difficult to unite our will to that of Mary, that is, during trials which harass us. It is easy enough to understand sickness; with a little faith, we readily discern the hand of God in it. But aridity, disgust, failure in prayer, coldness at Holy Communion; reverses in fortune, unpleasant accidents, disappointments, contradictions; especially misunderstandings, oppositions, jealousies, hypocritical or open persecution from men who ought to aid us—how are we to see the will of God and of our heavenly mother in these circumstances when all of them seem to hinder the work of God or to spring manifestly from human stupidity and meanness?

Undoubtedly, God does not will all this; He permits it. But God does not permit as we permit things—we who permit and tolerate what we cannot prevent. He could have prevented these trials had He so willed; He permits because He wills to permit, and He wills to permit for our greater good. St. Paul tells us: "Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good,"¹

¹ Rom. 8:28.

and all things include the foolishness and the malice of men. These things do not, of course, "work together unto good" for all men, but only "for those who love God," that is, for those who do what God wills for them in the circumstances in which they are. Now, if these circumstances "work together unto good" for us, it means that they contain some grace, and if it is a grace, it certainly comes from the Dispensatrix of all graces. She has had her word to say, and certainly she has said it out of love. Thus she wills that we accept the trial with complete resignation to the will of God, believing in God's and her own wisdom and goodness. But resignation will not be enough. Are we satisfied to be *resigned* to the favors which our heavenly Mother obtains for us? We should submit rather with joy and thankfulness because it is love that has sent us a trial for our greater spiritual profit. No matter what the trial, we will turn to her and say: "I am the child of the Lord's handmaid, be it done unto me according to thy word." We will smile at the test, perhaps even as we weep bitterly, but smile nevertheless, believing in the love of her who, through ways mysterious and supremely wise, leads us to union with her Son.

Mary herself will serve as model in this loving submission to the will of God. What disconcerting trials she had to endure in life: the obligation to contract marriage despite her vow of virginity; her miraculous conception, the cause of unspeakable anguish for Joseph; the refusal of the Bethlehemites to receive her with her Son; the flight into Egypt; the obscurity of the hidden life; the oppositions, contradictions, and persecutions during the public life of Jesus; the passion and death of her Son! Everywhere and always she submitted in full simplicity to the will of the Father, which she adored and loved, for everywhere and always she remained the handmaid of the Lord, eager that all be done according to His word.

With regard to our duties of state and our acceptance of trials, Mary generally speaks to us from the outside, through men and events. At times, though, she allows her voice to be heard from within, from the depths of the soul, through the inspirations of grace.

Every thought that comes to urge some apparently good action upon us is not in itself an inspiration of grace. It may only be the inspiration of a poorly regulated imagination, of a disordered sensibility, of a secret vanity, of a tendency to scruples, of an exaggerated idea

of perfection. "Beloved," said St. John to his disciples, "do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are of God."² Therefore spiritual writers have established what they call "rules for the discernment of spirits."

In most cases it is sufficient to see, in the given circumstances, whether the inspiration is conformable to reason and faith and, if need be, to the advice of a superior or a man of experience. Recourse to Mary, under the form of "consultation with the Blessed Virgin," of which there will be question later, will also be found useful.

Generally the difficulty does not consist in recognizing the inspirations of grace, but in obeying them. The interior voice suggests something which God expects of us, often a sacrifice. We feel urged to make an act of renouncement, to perform a work of charity or zeal, to spend leisure time in prayer, perhaps to enter upon a life of perfection. We are not obliged to respond to the appeal. An inspiration invites, it does not command — at least it does not command in the name of a strict law. It does command, however, in the name of love, the love of Jesus and Mary. Every grace comes to us through Mary; hence, also, this inspiration. It is our Mother who invites us to love Jesus better or to make Him better loved. Let us learn to recognize her voice and to answer, "Yes!"

Sometimes we do have the courage to pronounce that word, and then we are happy. Sometimes we let the occasion pass and with it the opportunity of causing pleasure to our Mother. Often there is a long struggle and we do not know who will be the victor. Grace speaks; we do not wish to recognize it. It returns and speaks again; we try to prove that what it asks is unreasonable or impossible. We are unhappy because we resist; at the same time we fear becoming unhappy if we yield. If, finally, we acknowledge that this voice pursuing us so persistently is the voice of our mother, and if we recall the total and unconditional donation which formerly we wished to make, we shall say, "Yes." Perhaps we consent with apprehension, but hardly have we pronounced the word than we feel ineffably happy, strong enough to undertake and suffer all things. Never shall we regret that confidence we have in her.

Many servants of Mary, out of devotion to their heavenly mother and in order to bind their wills as closely as possible to hers, make

the vow "to do always the more perfect thing." Others, to mark more certainly the Marian character of their engagement, make the vow of never refusing the Blessed Virgin anything, or of doing always what the Blessed Virgin wishes. No matter how it is designated, the substance of the vow is the same — that of doing always what is more perfect. Though, theoretically, it is more perfect to fast than to eat, to pray than to take part in entertaining conversation, to aid our neighbor than to engage in personal work, in a given situation it may be more perfect to eat, to amuse our companions, to work for ourselves, if the circumstances prove that such is the will of God — for the accomplishment of the will of God is absolutely the most perfect thing. Now, the will of Mary coincides always with that of God. Therefore, always to do what Mary desires, or never to refuse her anything, is doing the will of God, and, consequently, that which is most perfect.

Generally, it is wise to begin by making a temporary vow to test our strength. It is well also to consult first with our spiritual director. The vow might bind us on feasts of the Blessed Virgin, during a novena, during a month or several months, or for one or more years. When we are sure that such an engagement will not cause troubles of conscience, we may make the vow perpetual.

There may, however, be very generous souls who would be fearful of the obligations of such a vow. For them, it would be better not to make it but to be satisfied with the constant will never to refuse their heavenly mother anything. We must serve God and Mary with true liberty, the liberty of the children of God, and not in an atmosphere of servile fear.

Moreover, it is understood that the vow mentioned above obliges us only when there is certainty that such an act, here and now, is more perfect than any other act. In case of doubt, the soul retains its liberty of action.

On the other hand, when there is no fear of a troubled conscience, such a vow is often the beginning of rapid progress in union with Mary. Here is the testimony of a young religious priest:

More and more I am convinced of the necessity of union with Mary for attaining perfection. The more I unite myself to the Blessed Virgin, the more I feel the urgent necessity of perfect union with her in order to attain perfect love of Jesus. The more I unite myself with

Mary, the more I recognize my faults, my defects, my weaknesses. In the depths of my misery, I quiedy call upon the name of my heavenly Mother. She answers me. Immediately I feel peace, confidence, and courage surge again through my heart. Interiorly I hear the words: "Have no fear; I am with thee, I will be thy strength." And despite my misery, I entertain the constant hope of reaching the perfect love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When I invoke the Blessed Virgin, I feel that Jesus is with me, or rather, with *us*; and when I say Jesus, the Blessed Virgin is with me, that is, with *us*.

In the way of perfection, to live in union with the Blessed Virgin is like being on an escalator; one goes up continually. With her, I have no great difficulties on the way to perfection. She conducts me herself, taking me by the hand.

Since the day I made the vow of refusing the Blessed Virgin nothing, I felt ever more strongly this necessity of a life of union with her. I am very happy over it.

CHAPTER TEN

Consultation With Mary

Duties of state, exterior events, and inspirations of grace reveal to us the will and the desires of our heavenly Mother. To conform to all these indications of her wishes means evidently to live in very close union of will with her. Some of her children go even further; they are not satisfied with listening when she speaks to them; when she is silent, they consult her in order to know in every circumstance what she expects of them. Allusions to this practice are found in the biographies or in the writings of a number of saintly persons, especially in those of the past centuries.

"The august Mary is an excellent counselor and you will do well to follow her advice everywhere," remarked Father Chaminade to one of his fervent disciples.¹ To sodalists of the Blessed Virgin he recommended that they "consult her tastes."² The Venerable Cestac, a contemporary of Father Chaminade and, like him, a great servant of Mary, had the habit of consulting Mary in even the least of his actions. "It is she," he acknowledged, "that directs everything; she inspires me to write or to defer writing." On another occasion he stated: "For me, accustomed as I am to be led by the helping hand of the Blessed Virgin, I always fear to deviate in the least from the true path on which I must advance."³ "I would not wish even to hammer a nail into the house," he declared, "without first having asked permission of the most Blessed Virgin."⁴

We consult the Blessed Virgin as we would any other person in whom we have full confidence. We tell her what we propose to do;

¹To M. Chevaux, August 8, 1838. *Lettres de M. Chaminade*, tome III, p. 313.

²Notes of Instructions on the Blessed Virgin, p. 16.

³Le Vénérable L. E. Cestac, by Boudarrampc, pp. 455, 458.

⁴Ibid., p. 459.

we ask if she approves, or if she has other suggestions to offer. Sometimes we feel that Mary is satisfied with what we have submitted and we go ahead. At other times we feel that she does not approve; perhaps we are acting under the influence of a natural stimulus like egotism, haste, impatience; perhaps the means we propose would be ineffectual. When this happens, we must reflect in her presence on means better adapted to the end in view and to win her approval.

To consult Mary is not, therefore, to ask for ready-made solutions, which we merely have to apply. She does not favor intellectual laziness; she wishes to teach us to act, not to remain passive. When we consult her, she wishes that with the help of the grace she obtains for us, we reflect in her presence on the best means to adopt. The duration of the reflection can be very brief. Close to Mary we discern quickly what she desires, just as a child who looks to his mother before performing an act discerns quickly whether he should act or not. No matter how brief it be, consultation with Mary is a positive act, not the passive expectation of some sort of revelation.

Nor can we be said to consult Mary if we submit projects to her, asking her to bless them, and then immediately consider them approved. There are those who desire their spiritual director to make a sweeping sign of the cross over all their plans to invest them with his authority. The function of a guide is not to say "Amen" to all that is proposed to him, but to examine and if necessary to give greater precision or to modify before approving. To consult the Blessed Virgin we must not only submit to her what we propose to do; we must also wait to ascertain whether she approves or disapproves. Unfortunately, many souls are too hasty to know how to wait. Often our ideas about what we want to do are already formed and our consultation is a mere mumbling of words. In important matters we must assume an indifferent attitude toward the decision to take, in order to be ready to do what Mary prefers, and then only to see in her presence what she wishes.

Generally, consulting Mary is done more rapidly than the method analyzed might suggest. Often a mere glance at the Blessed Virgin suffices. Both the rapidity and efficacy of this practice benefit from the memory of the success or the failure we have experienced in similar situations in the past.

Is this *jeeling*, by which Mary approves or disapproves a proposed

course of action, a revelation? No, it is not, except perhaps in the case of souls favored by extraordinary mystical graces. To expect revelations normally would be to fall into the error of illuminism. Is it an *emotional impression* or a creation of the imagination? The answer again is *no*; emotions and imagination have nothing to do with this response from the Blessed Virgin.

What is it then? We can best define it as a quasi certitude to which the intellect, the heart, the will, and grace contribute.

Let us first examine the role of the intellect. Sometimes it is what the philosophers call the "reasoning intellect" that acts. Such is the case when there is question of finding, weighing, and comparing motives pro and con in the presence of the Blessed Virgin in order to see clearly which motives must predominate.

Generally it is the intuitive intellect which discerns, as by an infallible instinct, the preferences of Mary. There are analogous cases in the purely natural order. In a given situation a religious, for example, does not know what decision to take. Often he has only to ask: "What would my superior say?" Immediately he will have the required light. A lad at school is tempted to follow the example of a bad companion. He hesitates; in his conscience there is a struggle between motives for and against. The image of his mother arises in his mind. "What would mother say?" Immediately his doubt vanishes; his resolution is taken. In the same way the habitual preoccupation of conforming to all the intentions of his heavenly Mother permits the Marian soul to divine almost infallibly what she expects.

Moreover, reason is here assisted very efficaciously by the heart. The heart is capable of intuitions that surpass the limits of cold reason. A friend understands things about his friend which the cleverest psychologist could not divine. But are the bonds of friendship ever stronger than when we are in the presence of Mary and when we endeavor to discover what will cause her greatest pleasure?

The will intervenes at the same time as the mind and heart. We know what an important role the will plays in the acceptance of truths in the moral order, especially those that require us to hold our nature in check. The will must impose silence on the passions and on egotism; it must welcome truth sincerely such as it is, with its most formidable consequences. How many men do not see because they are afraid to look!

Close to Mary we do not fear to look; close to her the passions are calm, egotism is ashamed of itself; close to her we are sincere. "Every man is a liar," says the Holy Spirit.⁵ We deceive our neighbor; even more often, we deceive our own conscience. But we cannot deceive our heavenly Mother. To her, we confess all: egotism, hypocrisy, cowardice; before her, we recognize the rights of truth, no matter how exacting. For, even if we love ourselves very much, we love her more. Hence, we never see our duty so clearly and so quickly as when we examine it in the presence of Mary.

Until now the elements of this sense of certainty which we have analyzed have been of the natural order. These same elements may be found in other feelings of moral certitude where the thought of the Blessed Virgin does not enter, where, for that matter, there is even no supernatural activity. It is rare, however, that these elements operate with the same quasi infallibility as in consulting Mary. Even from our natural mother we may conceal the truth; from Mary, though, we cannot and will not hide anything. Her glance penetrates to the depths of the soul and forces it to be sincere. Above all, we would not at any price wish to deceive her.

There is another, more efficacious cause of the quasi certainty gained from consulting Mary. This fourth and final element is of the supernatural order; it is grace. Every Christian knows that God grants special lights to the soul that invokes Him in time of doubt. That is why, from the first centuries of Christianity, the faithful have had the habit of consulting God in their undertakings, of begging the Holy Spirit to enlighten them with His divine light: *accende lumen sensibus*.

Now, whoever consults the Blessed Virgin in order to learn her will has the right to expect some grace of enlightenment from her. Is Mary not the Spouse of the Spirit of Wisdom, the Mother of Good Counsel, the Mediatrix of all graces? We cannot consult her without receiving enlightenment, for the grace we solicit is not a favor which may not be conformable to the intentions of God, such as cures or spiritual consolations. It is always conformable to the intentions of God that we accomplish His will as perfectly as possible, and therefore, that we have special lights the better to carry out that holy will.

Thus, by a combination of natural and supernatural elements, we

are able to explain the certainty that we have of knowing the will of Mary when we consult her.

Is there question in this matter of an absolute certitude? No, only of a quasi certitude.

First, it may be that, for reasons which we shall see later, we make this consultation badly. Then, the elements of the solution may escape us through lack of experience or of pertinent information; only a revelation, upon which we cannot count, could bridge the gap here. However, in situations where we have sincerely tried to know the will of Mary, the solution we adopt, if not the best theoretically, is certainly the best practically. For if, after having prayed and reflected before Mary it seems to us that she desires us to follow a particular course of action, then in following it we act according to our conscience, and that is all that God requires of us. If He had wanted something else, He would have made it known to us because we had done all that depended on us to discern His will.

Moreover, even if after having consulted Mary we do not attain the precise result we had counted upon, we can still be sure that she is satisfied with our good will and that whatever the result, she has helped us to advance a step — provided of course that we continue to be guided by her. In order to teach her child to walk, a mother does not always hold its hand; she lets it make some steps alone, tottering and sometimes even stumbling, but she is always ready to catch it at the critical moment. The Blessed Virgin is a marvelous educator. If we tell her of our failure, she will help us see the causes and understand how to do better the next time.

Perhaps we shall need a number of consultations and trials; but if, instead of being discouraged, we consult her before each trial, we shall have made more progress at the end of a few months, sometimes weeks, than we made formerly in years.

Does Mary respond to all our consultations? No, at least not directly.

First of all, she will not answer, at least not definitively, the questions we should submit to our superiors. The Mother of Jesus certainly does not want to disturb the order established by her Son. She regards the "hierarchical way" too highly to wish to substitute for it. Yet, even in this case, it is useful to consult her in order to know how to present our problems to competent authority.

In questions, too, for which we can and should normally consult prudent and experienced men, Mary will not give us a definitive response before leading us to seek their advice.

At times in problems that do not require an immediate solution, she will leave us without a reply. She wants us to pray, reflect, and consult more. At the proper moment, the reply will come. Father Chaminade, who counseled his disciples "to seek the advice of the Blessed Virgin in all things," sometimes hesitated long before taking a decision. But when the hour for action came, there was light from above and he made decisions that, in their precise and irrevocable character, astonished those who had first been impatient over the delay.

Sometimes, however, when we can neither consult prudent men nor delay, she leaves us without response. Perhaps it is because we are not recollected. Perhaps God wants us to pass through a spiritual trial. In the latter event we may choose the solution which seems best. The Blessed Virgin is satisfied because we have done what depended on us. As a general rule, interior, simple, and loving souls, looking a moment at their Mother, know what she expects of them.

About what should we consult the Blessed Virgin? About our actions and the manner of performing them. Most of our actions are indicated by our duties of state. Those of religious are almost all prompted by their rule and their superiors. It is useless, therefore, to ask Mary if we should perform such actions.

As I have already remarked, however, there is in every life room for initiative. The use of this initiative may be of supreme importance from the viewpoint both of the effect upon us and of the effect upon others. Francis Xavier's reply freely given to Ignatius determined that the former became a saint and the apostle to innumerable multitudes of pagans. The decision of Martin Luther, a powerful preacher, to refuse submission to the pope, caused the loss of millions of souls to the Catholic Church. No one knows how much good or evil he effects by deciding to do a particular good or evil act.

If we do not have to ask Mary whether or not we should do most of our actions, we still can ask her *how* to do them. This problem is never completely resolved because we can always do them better. What is significant is not so much the importance of the action as the intensity of the love with which we perform it. It is a common-

place that to become saints we do not have to do other things, but otherwise. What is not commonplace is to know how to do otherwise, how to put into our ordinary actions as much love as the saints did. How can we know this? By Mary and through Mary. Those who consult her know offhand the best manner of loving Jesus. And those who consult her and act with her are certain to act with as much love as possible.

It is evident that at the beginning of this practice we shall not succeed in consulting the Blessed Virgin in all our actions. We must start with what is most important. What is most important in spiritual work is the resolution, for on each resolution a whole series of actions depends. Mental prayer, particular examen, spiritual renewals, reviews in the evening, at the end of the week, at monthly or annual retreats—all these exercises should end in practical resolutions. But resolutions are much more precise, much more energetic, and especially much more efficacious, if they have been submitted to Mary and have been approved by her.

After this we should endeavor to submit other actions to Mary; first, the most important, and then, little by little, all of them.

Sometimes there will be occasion to consult Mary not only at the beginning but also at the end of an action, especially after failure. Suppose it has been the failure of some spiritual or apostolic project. We must not remain under the depressing influence of defeat. For the child of Mary there are no real defeats. This battle may indeed be lost, but there is always time to win another. We must tell our Mother what has taken place, what means we have employed, what seems to have caused the failure; we must see with her how we will act the next time and be careful to work in her name. Courage will return and success will follow.

Finally it is important to ask the advice of Mary in making reparation for our faults. It happens to all of us, it happens even to the saints, that we commit faults and imperfections. There are souls who have raised themselves to perfection after having committed sins that were more serious or after having been enslaved by passions that were more dangerous than the sins and passions of others who still remain in mediocrity. Why is this? Perhaps there has been a difference in liberality on the part of God; perhaps also there has been a difference in generosity on the part of these souls. The former have made

generous reparation for their faults and have tried to love Jesus all the more in the degree that they have saddened Him. The others have accumulated negligence upon negligence without making reparation. For the former, faults have even been the occasion of greater love; they were "happy faults" because of the results produced. For the others, each negligence caused a relaxation in the forward march, a coldness in relations with Jesus. In the life of certain servants of God, some fault followed by a particularly generous reparation seems to have been the starting point of their sanctity. Such, for example, was the case with Francis of Assisi, who brushed off the leper who had begged an alms; and with John Gualbert, who was about to stab the murderer of his brother. In everyone's life reparation for faults has certainly been one of the most decisive factors on the way to perfection.

How should we make reparation? It is related that St. Aloysius Gonzaga remade his spiritual exercises whenever they were torn by distractions, until he could pray two hours continuously without any distraction. Let us, however, pass over the example of this saint, who seems to have had special graces of prayer. If we attempted to do the same, were it only to remain five minutes without distraction, some of us would have to remain kneeling until the moment of death. Should we, however, imitate those who in moments of fervor decide to remake as many minutes of spiritual exercises as they spoil by their negligence, or decide to remake at least part of these exercises? In general, bookkeeping in our relations with God is not to be counseled. We run the risk of bargaining with Him and of complicating our lives. In union with the Blessed Virgin, things are easier; in each case, we see with her how we can love Jesus after our fault as much as before it, how we can love Him even more than if we had not been negligent. This is, after all, the principal thing. We must adjust ourselves to circumstances, and with Mary we understand immediately how to make this adjustment.

If consultation with Mary is one of the most fruitful practices, it is also one of the most easily neglected, even by those who are convinced of its importance. The reason for this is the number of powerful obstacles we encounter in ourselves.

There is, first of all, a certain spiritual sluggishness which has a horror of all personal work requiring effort. Consultation with Mary

requires the effort of reflection; therefore, we consent more easily to recite a decade of the beads than to submit our activity to the Blessed Virgin for an instant.

At other times the soul is too busy and too exteriorized to recollect itself in the presence of Mary in order to hear her voice.

Again, it is attachment to some disordered tendency that is opposed to consultation with the Blessed Virgin. Instead of putting ourselves into a state of holy indifference regarding the decision of Mary, we imagine that she approves what pleases us, and we do not consult her, or we consult her only as a matter of form.

But the most frequent obstacle undoubtedly is haste. Often this haste rushes us into actions by a sort of automatic force before we have submitted them to Mary. Even souls advanced in union with Mary will be content merely to offer their action to her without stopping for a second to ask her advice. They think they know what they have to do. But, even granting that they do, they would act with more calm, more facility, more love, and also with more expedition, if they began with the approving smile of their Mother. At other times, we do stop, indeed, to submit ideas to Mary; but hardly have we proposed the idea than we put it into execution without waiting for her reply. A special chapter will treat of haste and the way to combat it.

It is, once more, close to Mary that we find the remedies for all these obstacles. Souls generous enough to use these remedies come to the point where they permit themselves to be guided by her in all things; they also realize perfectly the motto, *Maria duce*, With Mary as Leader! They no longer act in their own name. Mary acts through them.

We cannot overestimate the importance of the practice of consulting Mary. What has been said so far leads inevitably to that conclusion, but the evidence cannot be truly understood except by those that have made a habit of the practice.

The biographer of Olympia d'Hoogvorst, daughter and disciple of the foundress of the Society of Mary Reparatrix, Emilia d'Oultremont, baroness of Hoogvorst, writes this: "She walks carrying her cross 'as close as possible to Mary, glued to her,' to use her own expression, constantly aware of her presence, consulting her on everything, guided, sustained, raised, and even corrected by the Blessed Mother, par-

ticularly in matters of charity. . . . She confesses, 'I deal with her in all my affairs. . . . As for me, I could not live without her, because it is through her that I live.'""

By this consultation, Mary becomes, so to speak, the constant guide of the soul. Certainly she does not wish to take the place of an earthly spiritual director, and when necessary she sends the soul to him. But the latter can attend to a client only from time to time; he can enlighten and exhort; he cannot directly help us to will and act. Mary is at the disposition of the soul for all its actions, all its resolutions, all its uncertainties, at each hour of the day and night. She is not satisfied with enlightening and exhorting; she also strengthens the will with inundations of grace.

This practice allows the soul to carry out actions with the greatest perfection, for the soul that consults Mary about what it has to do and the way of doing it, always does the will of God and does it most perfectly.

Consequently, its progress is rapid. The repetition of an action adds to the facility of performance, but not necessarily to its perfection. What allows a soul to progress without ceasing is the care taken to perform its actions well. There are religious who make their meditations daily for many years but always as badly as in the beginning, perhaps even worse. In contrast, those who apply themselves to mental prayer under the direction of Mary make constant progress.

This practice assures great purity of conscience, since instead of seeking itself, the soul endeavors in all things to do only the will of Mary, which is that of God. It establishes the soul in deep peace, the reward of self-renunciation and of constant fulfillment of the divine will. Often it produces joy as well as peace, for Mary directs the soul to cause Jesus as much happiness as possible in all things, and the knowledge of having given joy to Him fills the soul itself with joy. In addition, an altogether new confidence sustains the soul that acts only after consulting Mary, because it feels strong with the strength of her whose will it executes.

Even in actions of the temporal order, consultation with Mary proves a means of success. Souls that have the habit of consulting Mary soon notice that she directs them even in their natural activities.

CONSULTATION WITH MARY

A certain businessman, burdened with the delicate administration of family affairs, is often asked by his neighbors: "What do you do to succeed so well? You seem to have less trouble with your affairs than we with ours." What does he do? He undertakes nothing without first asking the advice of the Blessed Virgin and then acting in her name.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Union With Mary and Temptations

Since the fall of our first parents, the will of every human being, except that of Mary Immaculate, has been weak and inclined to evil both by original sin and by the devil. Now in the entire Catholic world recourse to Mary is acknowledged as one of the most powerful means, almost an infallible means, to resist temptation. Clients of the Blessed Virgin also succeed in living habitually in the state of grace, in observing the law of purity which to others seems beyond human strength.

The reasons for this are easily understood. Mary certainly wishes the loyalty of a tempted soul, more even than the tempted person himself. Mortal sin would rob her of a child for whom she suffered so much, for whom she sacrificed her Son; it would nullify the Passion and death of Jesus; it would give Satan the victory. Even if there were question of venial sin only, it would be an offense against God, a cause of suffering to Christ, a lack of delicacy to her mother heart.

On the other hand, her function as Distributrix of all graces permits her to fulfill this desire and to give to every person who invokes her sincerely, whether saint or sinner, the strength to resist all temptations of the flesh or of the devil.

Souls habitually united to Mary find it easier to resist temptations for other special reasons. First, intimacy with a person whom we love and admire creates between us an identity of soul which leads us, even unconsciously, to think, judge, love, hate, wish, or refuse the same way as he in given cases. Habitual contact with our Immaculate Mother practically destroys all the attraction of the great temptations which cause the fall of most men, namely, impurity, pride, cruelty, hate, and avarice. In our ordinary relations with her who is all pure,

miraculously pure, how could we escape being enamored of purity and being disgusted with everything vile? Close to her who is greater than the angels and who was destined to become mother of the Almighty, close to her who called herself simply the handmaid of the Lord and recognized that all her privileges were a gratuitous gift of God, how can a person vaunt his excellence or despise others? Near her, who was willing to suffer so much and to sacrifice even her Son for the salvation of mankind, near her who is still constantly pre-occupied with obtaining graces to render us happy on earth and in heaven, how can anybody not be carried away by love for men, who are her children, other Christs? In such constant and familiar relations with one who, though rich today with all the wealth of heaven, was once happy to live on earth with her Son in poverty and privation, how can we attach our hearts to the perishable goods of this world? Must we not rejoice to be able to share her poverty when the occasion presents itself? The same reasoning holds for other temptations.

In still another way Mary immunizes those who live in her presence against every temptation. We have seen, and we shall see again later, how Mary always orientates us toward Jesus in all that is to be done or avoided, and induces us to give greatest joy to Jesus; also how the constant preoccupation of causing Him pleasure will make it impossible for us to sadden Him by yielding to a temptation even when the matter is light.

There are, however, camouflaged temptations which under beautiful guise can present themselves even to a soul generally united to Mary. The chapters on union with Mary in our feelings and in distractions will furnish us with the means to side-track such temptations and to immolate to Jesus all self-seeking.

Union of Sentiments

CHAPTER TWELVE

Importance of This Union

Intimate friends feel the need of communicating their sentiments to each other. Friends, in fact, do not really love each other if they do not spontaneously share joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. The child especially feels the urgent need of telling his mother all that stirs his emotions. What must have been the relations of Jesus and Mary in this respect! Joys and pains, trials and consolations, everything was in common. The child of Mary, in like manner, is led naturally to tell his heavenly Mother all the sentiments of his heart. As St. Teresa of the Child Jesus said: "One does not hide anything from Mary."

Our sentiments are a significant and intimate part of our personality. The manifestations of our ego involve a great number of images, ideas, judgments, and decisions. But that is not all; they involve also our impressions, emotions, feelings, aspirations, and tendencies, for each act of intellect or of will is ordinarily accompanied by a whole series of feelings and sentiments. Have we not given ourselves entirely to our Blessed Mother? Would we wish to withdraw from her influence this very important and intimate part of our personality?

For the most part our images, our ideas, our judgments originate on the outside; even our resolutions are most often imposed by exterior conditions. But our sentiments are entirely ours. Our emotions, our feelings, our aspirations are the most personal part of ourselves. If we desire to Marianize our thoughts, our resolves, our actions, that is, those things which ordinarily constitute our superficial selves, will we not also wish to impress a Marian stamp upon that which constitutes our deepest, most intimate selves, our real selves properly speaking?

There are, moreover, great advantages in communicating our sentiments to Mary. The greatest is that she perfects them all.

At times she intensifies them. We feel doubly happy if we can tell our good fortune to a friendly heart. When the child of Mary has recounted its joys to its heavenly Mother, it feels that these joys are doubly sweet and intense.

Sometimes she softens them. A sorrow shared is a sorrow eased. Who can count the number of souls in sorrow that have found peace and consolation close to the Mother of Sorrows? They understand why she is called the Comforter of the afflicted.

She purifies our sentiments. How easily self-seeking insinuates itself into our feelings! But, when we share them with our heavenly Mother, she makes us see our hidden egotism and helps us to root it out.

She transforms our sentiments if they are not in conformity to the will of God. Marie Petyt—the future Flemish mystic, Mary of St. Theresa—in her youth was wavering between the attractions of a life of holiness and the blandishments of the world. She made a pilgrimage to the celebrated Shrine of Hall to ask the good Virgin to make her pretty so that she might attract attention. The Blessed Virgin heard the prayer in her own motherly way. The young lady came from Hall with the resolution to attract no attention but that of Jesus. She became a cloistered nun.

There is another reason, and an important one, for endeavoring to subject everything in the domain of our sensibility to the influence of Mary. From our sentiments we gain knowledge of our real selves, knowledge that can be a prelude to reformation and to the transformation of ourselves into Jesus. This inner self, hidden under our superficial self, is made up of tendencies, aspirations, and energies of which we have only a vague idea. In new surroundings, at a moment of crisis, or before unforeseen obstacles, we experience sentiments, we discover desires, we feel urges, and perhaps we say or do things that astonish and shock, not only those who thought they knew us, but even ourselves. As long as the surface of the lake is calm, the sun is reflected in it, the trees are mirrored there, the birds of heaven come to drink, silvery fishes swim about peacefully. But let a squall blow up. Waves form and slimy animal matter or decayed vegetation rises from the bottom. "Was all that in me?" we exclaim in astonishment. And we are forced to answer, "Yes, without doubt, and probably there is still more!"

But how are we to see what is hidden in these depths before it is

too late, before the irrevocable word has been pronounced, before the fatal act has been performed? When in moments of recollection, after the reception of Holy Communion, or in a retreat, we attempt to examine ourselves as penetratingly as possible, we see only those tendencies which are generally under the control of intelligence and will, of an intelligence and a will conformed to God's will. If we try to penetrate further, we find ourselves faced with a black whirlpool. Before we know what this whirlpool conceals shall we have to wait for a new storm to break? No, there is a way to discern what takes place in the depths of our being by taking note of certain indications, namely, our emotions and sentiments. It happens invariably that when one of our tendencies has been satisfied, we experience pleasure; when one of them has been opposed, we are unhappy. Every time, therefore, that we are affected agreeably or disagreeably, we can be absolutely sure that one of our tendencies, acknowledged or hidden, has been satisfied or contradicted. We tell ourselves, for example, and we tell it to the Lord, that we pardon someone from the bottom of our hearts for having offended us. Henceforth we shall love him with the very love with which we love Jesus. Then we learn that he has just had a humiliating experience, and we immediately feel quite pleased about it. Is this the way we love Jesus? Undoubtedly we still keep some trace of rancor for the person in our hearts. Again, we have meditated long on our nothingness and our sins. From that hour, we will be hidden with Christ in God and participate in His opprobrium. Vanity is foolishness; humility is gain. These are our sincere convictions. Not an hour later, in conversation on an ordinary topic, someone declares our arguments ridiculous. We become upset. Ah, our wonderful humility! Our beautiful dreams of sharing in the opprobrium of Christ! ... In this way our feelings of joy and sadness betray the real depths of our being; they are a marvelous psychoanalysis. It suffices to ask why we feel happy or discontented to discover the tendencies that lie dormant within us. It is necessary to know ourselves in order to empty ourselves of self so that we may substitute the life of our Lord for the life of corrupt nature, and we may be able to say truly, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

Because people generally neglect to pay attention to impressions and emotions which they themselves do not voluntarily arouse, few

souls, even pious souls, know themselves thoroughly and convert completely. For Marian souls there is a natural means of knowing self; it consists in telling these experiences to their heavenly Mother. By confiding to her our various feelings, we note them more clearly, and quite naturally we see whether the tendency that has evoked them is good or bad. "Mother, would you, in my place, be happy or sad?" Close to her we are sincere, we acknowledge more easily whether it is because of Jesus or because of ourselves that we are happy or sad, and it costs us less to reform.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Union With Mary in Order to Cause Jesus All the Joy Possible

What is the purpose of the union of our will with Mary's? It is to do the will of Jesus always. Mary does not exist, breathe, or act except for Jesus, and her will in our regard is that we, too, live only for Jesus, that in everything we do His will. Instead of the formula, "to do the will of Jesus," St. Teresa of the Child Jesus preferred another, "to cause Jesus pleasure." Those formulas are practical equivalents, inasmuch as we always please Jesus in doing His will, and without it we cannot cause Him pleasure. The formula, "to cause Jesus pleasure," is perhaps more catchy because it adds to the idea of obedience to Jesus that of bringing Him joy. He showed us so much human affection, He worked and suffered so much for us, that the prospect of giving Him a bit of pleasure in return powerfully stimulates our will to obey.

This perfect practice is at the same time extremely simple. With Mary it is easy to surmise what will procure most joy to Jesus. Whether there is question of doing something, of fulfilling a duty, of rendering a service, of imposing a sacrifice upon oneself, of reciting an extra prayer, or question of avoiding something, a vain word, a petty revenge, certain company — if we demand of Mary what will cause Jesus greater pleasure, she will make us understand at once. If I am sorely tried, she invites me to unite my suffering to the sufferings of Jesus to console Him. I am in bad humor, or perfectly listless, or I may even have committed a fault. "Mother, what am I to do?" — "Come to Jesus with your mother, with your misery and your confidence, and you will bring Him a threefold joy."

Perhaps these efforts and renunciations will cost our nature plenty.

If I ask myself, "Should I do such an act of virtue, perform such a sacrifice?" my good old human nature will find a dozen pretexts to excuse me. But if I ask Mary, what can I refuse her? Besides, the pleasure that I am sure of giving to Jesus and to her because of Jesus renders my sacrifice easy. St. Augustine said long ago: "He who loves, suffers not; or if he suffers, he loves what he suffers."

We sense that this preoccupation of always pleasing Jesus in the name of Mary should greatly aid our souls to live continually in joy, in generosity, and in intimacy with Jesus and Mary.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Union With Mary and Peace

All the masters of the spiritual life insist on the importance of peace of soul. God may will that we pass through distressing trials; He never wills that we lose our interior peace. Peace is one of the surest tests in what ascetical writers call "the discernment of spirits," that is, the ability to recognize whether we are acting at the prompting of grace, of nature, or of an evil spirit. Every interior act, every act of piety, every work of zeal which troubles our peace of soul comes from an evil spirit or from our vitiated nature. All that establishes the soul in serene peace comes from God. God is a God of peace; He does not act in disorder. His visitations sometimes frighten, they never disturb.

How can we maintain the soul in a state of divine peace? By desiring always the will of God. Peace is the tranquillity of order; and order, for the soul, is the fulfillment of the will of God. We become restless when we refuse to obey the will of the Most High. "Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" asks the holy man Job.¹ We experience peace as soon as we consent to conform ourselves to the divine will, no matter what it requires of us.

If we act in union with Mary, this conformity is particularly easy. With her, first of all, we quickly drive out all self-seeking, as we have seen in the preceding pages. With her, we are better disposed to follow the desires of God. At the side of her who said so simply and so generously, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word," it is easy to acquiesce to the divine will. In the midst of the most terrible trials, it suffices to behold the Virgin all peaceful in order to share her peace. Her example teaches us to be strong, and her all-powerful intercession supports our strength.

¹ Job 9:4.

Therefore peace, that peace "which surpasseth all understanding,"² is the natural climate of Marian souls.

Of course it happens that our peace is exposed to disturbance. We remain children of Adam and therefore subject to the disorders of self-seeking. If, as soon as we are disquieted, we reveal our uneasiness to Mary, we receive the word that restores our peace.

Sometimes it is physical or moral suffering that threatens our peace. A glance at the Mother of Sorrows and at Jesus crucified brings immediate resignation to our souls and, with it, divine serenity.

At times it is the anticipation of a sacrifice which terrifies the soul: what God is asking is too difficult; we shall never be able to give it to Him. We try to turn away, we endeavor to forget; but the divine urgency pursues us. We cast ourselves at the feet of Mary. "Mother, I cannot," we cry, and gently Mary makes us understand that Jesus is seeking only our happiness and that she will help us yield to His desires. Hardly have we responded with a timid "yes" than we become entirely transformed and completely happy in the peace we have regained.

Sometimes it is the prospect of a delicate task to accomplish that may undermine our calm. The remembrance of our total belonging to Mary gives courage and peace. The superioress of a religious community makes the following statement:

Formerly the prospect of certain difficult situations disquieted and frightened me, especially when there was question of refusing permissions or of reproving faults. Now, in similar conditions I simply say: "O my Mother, I am all thine, and I will do all that thou desirest of me," and my soul remains in peace.

There are some who are disturbed by the ideas of others. They attempt to bring these people around to their own way of thinking. And when these efforts are in vain, they are annoyed and grieved. Or perhaps it is the conduct of others that disturbs them. How can people act like that? What a scandal! They make remarks about such conduct, directly or obliquely, or have others make remarks. When that proves useless, they are completely upset. Let them take their chagrin to Mary. She will help them understand that their agitation comes from being more preoccupied with self than with God; that, if they have no charge over the offending person, they should simply pray

² Phil. 4:7.

for him, edify him, and perhaps, on occasion, give him good counsel, but not force him to change his ideas or his conduct; that, if they are responsible for him, they must remember that God wants their efforts and not their success. Let them pray and imitate His patience which waits years for the hour of repentance. As long as they exercise their apostolate in the name of Mary, they are certain of doing good to souls. It matters little if they see this good on earth or learn of it only in heaven.

The news of personal or public misfortunes can throw a soul into confusion. Here again, peace is recovered close to Mary. The following is an extract from a diary:

November 2, 1943. One defeat after another, the debacle, the armistice, its violation by Hitler, and the increasingly brutal exactions of the Führer, came day after day to upset me and deprive me of peace of mind until I determined to tell everything to Mary. She made me understand that in the end "all will turn to the advantage of those who love God," that she will never abandon a country which takes pride in being her kingdom and where she has so many loving children. Since that time, bad news still afflicts me but without taking peace or confidence from me; it urges me to pray better and to live more fervently.

Temptation does not, at least not for long, rob a soul united to Mary of peace, for with Mary victory is assured. A young man writes:

My soul is sometimes disturbed by temptations. I say: "Mother, I abandon everything to you. Tell me what am I to do." And peace returns.

It happens that we yield to temptation and commit venial sin, perhaps even mortal sin, or there is at least an infidelity to grace. This is a disorder, and disorder makes us lose peace of soul. When this happens we must not wait for the day of confession to recover our serenity of soul; we must not even wait until we have made reparation. Let us go at once to Jesus in the company of our Mother, with contrition and with confidence, and we shall confer upon Jesus a triple joy that will re-establish our peace. When we go to Him with her, we give Him the joy of seeing us close to her who loves Him so much and whom He has made the Refuge of sinners. When we go to Him with contrition, we cause Him joy by the humble avowal of our fault.

Recall the joy which the sinful woman caused Him, weeping at His feet; recall the prodigal son confessing his unworthiness; the good thief on the cross. And because we express our sorrow in the company of Mary, it is more sincere and more humble and will give greater joy to Jesus. When we go to Him with confidence, it proves that we believe in His love, that we know His mercy is infinitely greater than our misery. Recall His enthusiasm when confronted by the faith of the centurion, of the Canaanite woman, of the public sinner. And because we come to Him with our mother, our confidence also is greater and we cause our Saviour a particularly sweet joy. Thus, if we have saddened Him, we must come to cause Him this triple joy, and He will pardon and forget all. Jesus is satisfied; we should also be satisfied and re-established in peace. Only then should we consult with Mary whether we ought not make some reparation so that our unfortunate fault will be transformed into a "happy fault." But we must not seek our peace in the thought of that reparation; we seek it rather in the thought of the love of Jesus and Mary.

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus understood this doctrine well and taught it to those about her. Once, while in a fever, she hesitated a moment to render a service. That evening she wrote to her "Little Mother": "Dear Mother, I confess that I am much happier for having been imperfect for an instant than if, supported by grace, I had been a model of patience. It does me so much good to see that Jesus is always so sweet and so tender toward me. Really, it is enough to make one die of gratitude."³

This practice of going to Jesus in the company of Mary with contrition and confidence succeeds every time we have lost our peace, no matter what the provocation.

There are souls perpetually disturbed because they constantly fear that they have offended God. Unfortunate souls, perhaps they are very pure, very generous, very zealous. Will there ever be any peace for them? Let them also go to Mary, and instead of tiring their confessors with their perpetual anguish, let them confess to their Mother in heaven. Mary will teach them to judge their conscience, not before the frightening specter of sin which their foolish imagination has invented, but before a Saviour who is infinitely loving and merciful. "Jesus, if I have offended You, pardon me. If I have not offended You,

³ Ni. Philipon, O.P., *Sainte Lherese de Lisieux*, p. 75 f.

thank You. In either case, I remain Your friend. With Your Mother I believe; I believe that Your love for me is greater than my malice. I abandon myself to You." Experience with souls no doubt caused St. Louis Mary de Montfort to write in several passages of his *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary* that "a person genuinely devout to the Blessed Virgin is not at all scrupulous or fearful," for even if he has been scrupulous, "this Mother of holy love will take every scruple and every servile fear from his heart."⁴

Consider the experience of a priest tormented for a long time by a scrupulous conscience:

For a person inclined to scrupulosity, the greatest advantages of a life of union with Mary are greater confidence, less mental anguish, and a constant spur to live by convictions of faith.

In the midst of the occupations and preoccupations of life, the Marian soul enjoys peace. Here is the testimony of a mother busy with the cares and responsibilities of a large family:

What a grace to have known the Blessed Virgin in constant union! And what strength! You feel yourself led on by Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin; every anxiety is dispelled. It is the Holy Trinity that does all. My God, help me not to place any obstacles in the way.

In all of our troubles let us turn to Mary immediately. This counsel is of capital importance. We are tempted first to reason out the trouble alone or to discuss with others the causes of these interior anxieties. This is poor technique, a pure waste of time, often causing an aggravation of the disorder. Before God alone can we find true peace, and Mary is the direct path that leads to Him.

The more the soul is united to Mary, the more it enjoys divine peace, a peace that is almost uninterrupted. When Herod was seeking the newborn King to slaughter Him, Jesus slept peacefully in the arms of His Mother on the way to Egypt. This is a perfect symbol of every Marian soul. Such a soul always reposes peacefully in the arms of its mother.

⁴Nos. 109, 215, 264.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Union With Mary and Confidence

THE motives that induce all Christian souls to have confidence in Mary are especially compelling for Marian souls. For them particularly Mary can and will obtain all things.

For them, moreover, there is a very distinct motive for confidence: Jesus and Mary love them in a special way. How can this be true? These souls, after all, have committed sins and have been guilty of cowardice in the service of God. What exceptional good do Jesus and Mary see in them to love them with a special love?

Such an objection is based on a false idea of the love of God and of His Mother. God and Mary do not love in the way that men love each other, with a natural love. We love those in whom we see, or in whom we believe that we see, qualities which please us or possibilities from which we may profit; in other words, because of the good which we see, or believe that we see, in them, we like them. God and Mary love us, not because of the good they see in us, but because of the good which they have placed and will continue to place in us. God gives gratuitously, to one more, to another less, five talents or two talents or one talent, according to His free will. We have not merited our supernatural vocation. Mary herself did not *merit* to become the Mother of God. To raise her so high, God regarded the lowliness of His handmaid. Instead of the daughter of Anne, He could have chosen any other daughter of Israel. But God loved her gratuitously, with an altogether unique love, and that is why He bestowed such a unique vocation upon her. In order to judge the measure of God's love for any individual we must consider the vocation to special graces which God has destined for him. To feel drawn to a special devotion to Mary and a special confidence in her is a choice vocation; it is, therefore, the sign of a love apart, and, in consequence, a most distinctive motive for confidence.

Habitual union with Mary not only adds this motive to the ordinary motives for confidence,¹ it gives to our very sentiment of confidence a character of particular firmness.

First of all, this union is a devotion to Mary that is always in action. It is not an on-again, off-again devotion and therefore not an on-again, off-again confidence, sometimes strong, sometimes weak. It is a vigorous and simultaneous current of devotion and confidence.

Furthermore, constant and intimate contact with the Blessed Virgin gives the soul a vivid awareness of Mary's unmatched goodness and power. The fact that saints actually obtain miracles from our Lord does not astonish us. But people who surrounded Christ during His life on earth were far from being saints. Still they had enough confidence to obtain the most astonishing cures from the Master. The reason is that their close association with Him made His mercy and His power perceptible to them. Whoever lives in constant union with the Blessed Virgin perceives, in like manner, the inexhaustible tenderness and power of her to whom her Son refuses nothing.

Simple souls, those who live the life of evangelical childhood more perfectly, find confidence easy. "He who advances with simplicity advances with confidence," declares the Holy Spirit.² Are we astonished to see Jesus grant the little Carmelite of Lisieux a favor which might seem to be merely the whim of a young girl: a fresh snowfall for the day of her investiture?³ The life of union with Mary, especially when it includes the communication of our thoughts and feelings to her, develops naturally into a life of evangelical childhood. From this union flows a confidence in Jesus and Mary that is also fearless.

Even from a purely natural point of view we can see the reason for the remarkable confidence of those who live in union with the Blessed Virgin. Because of their union, they are habitually joyous and generous. And just as the gloomy and selfish man grows pessimistic, so the joyful and generous becomes ever more optimistic and confident. The selfish man understands only selfishness; the generous heart understands generosity.

Moreover, souls that have arrived at the state of habitual union with Mary notice their constant success, and nothing increases confidence

¹ *My Ideal*, E. Neubert, Part II, Chap. VII; *La Dévotion à Marie*, E. Neubert, Part III, Chap. VII.

² Prov. 11:3.

³ *History of a Soul*, Chap. VII.

like victory. Everything becomes possible to them when they act in the name of Mary. Advancing from victory to victory, how could they lack confidence?

Without doubt, they also are exposed to depressed feelings, such as result from sickness, vexations, persecutions, calumnies, apparent failures. . . . But by speaking of them to Mary, these souls are able to transform such feelings into sentiments of confidence. A glance at Mary makes these souls quickly understand that a natural obstacle is often a supernatural aid, that the cross is a condition of success, and especially of love. And to what are they aspiring if not to love, and to an ever increasing love?

Temptations assail them, too, sometimes with a terrifying violence. And yet these souls are no longer frightened. Formerly they were seized by fear at the first moment, as the disciples who awakened Jesus during the storm. Now the Master does not have to scold them any more for their lack of faith. Instinctively, at the approach of the tempter, they take refuge in the arms of their mother, who shelters them near her immaculate heart. There they feel perfectly secure; the serpent may strike at the heel of the Woman, he will not reach her heart.

As union with Mary becomes closer and more constant, confidence becomes firmer and more universal. In constant contact with her who is all pure, the soul purifies itself of all self-seeking; in filial familiarity with the all-loving mother, it feels its capacity to love ever increasing. The thoughts, the aspirations, the desires of Mary have become its own. Like Mary, what could it desire more than to love Jesus and to make Him loved? And this sole desire it feels certain of realizing: it is enough to strive with Mary to love Jesus and to make Him loved. What consuming ambition, boundless confidence, supreme happiness!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Union With Mary and Joy

Every true Christian lives in an atmosphere of joy. Already to the faithful Jews, by the mouth of the psalmist, God had made the recommendation: "Serve ye the Lord with gladness!"¹ With even greater reason is joy a prescription for the disciples of Christ. Emphatically St. Paul repeats to the faithful of Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice."² Can we be children of God, sharers in His nature, brothers of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost, future partakers of the eternal beatitude of the most Holy Trinity, without feeling joy in our souls?

The thought of Mary adds the nuance of filial spontaneity to this ordinary Christian joy. Even mature Christians reveal their childlike hearts when they honor their heavenly Mother. On occasion, young and old are happy to sing Marian hymns, to celebrate Mary's feasts, to visit her shrines, to swell the crowds at Marian congresses, to take part in processions and in other demonstrations in her honor. Recall in this connection the enthusiasm aroused by the triumphal tour of the Pilgrim Virgin, or of Our Lady of Fatima. It is not in vain that we invoke her in the litany as the Cause of our joy. Is a child ever happier than in the presence of its mother?

Marian souls, living constantly in the presence of their Mother, more than any others breathe and move habitually in an atmosphere of serenity and contentment. The Constitutions of the Society of Mary contain the following article:

Who has more reason to be and to appear happy and content than the man consecrated to God under the auspices of Mary?³

IPs. 94:12.

¹ Phil. 4:4.

³ Article 230.

And again:

Bearing in mind the words addressed by Jesus to his beloved disciple: *Ecce mater tua*, "Behold thy mother," the professed of the Society prefers to any other happiness that of being called and of being in reality the child of Mary. He knows that all good things come to him together with his Mother . . . he does not weary thinking of her and having recourse to her, speaking of her goodness, explaining how she is, in all truth, our Mother, our life, the cause of our joy, and the ground of our hope?

All the villagers and pilgrims at Ars noticed the special joy that illuminated the ascetic countenance of the holy Curé on the feast days of Mary. In the process of canonization, a farmer of Ars declared: "His face would light up with a smile of happiness. . . . From his place in the pulpit he would turn toward the statue of Mary with the joy of a child who speaks to his well-beloved Mother."

On the evening of December 8, 1854, the day on which the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed,

. . . the village was bright with lights. The Curé, before leaving the church, wished with his own hands to set the biggest of the bells to ringing. It was . . . a joyous celebration. The saint walked through the streets, surrounded by the visiting priests and the Brothers of the Holy Family. His features radiated happiness. Never was a child more happy to see his mother honored?

The joys of the Marian soul are many. There is the joy of pleasing our Lord and of being another Jesus for Mary; the joy of feeling constantly at peace and of sensing confidence; the joy of experiencing constant success in the name of Mary; the joy of always working for her; the joy of making her known, loved, and served; the joy of seeing her honored; the joy of making progress in the love of Jesus in union with Mary; the joy of bringing happiness to Jesus through Mary, and to Mary through Jesus. Brother Leonard once wrote:

To live my Marian life with Jesus, to give him the delightful joy of being able to love Mary on earth through me and in me, to give Mary the joy of seeing her Son live again in me — what a glorious thought!⁸

⁴ Article 294, 295.

⁵ *L'Âme du Curé d'Ars*, by Father Trochu, pp. 160, 161.

• *Op. at.*, p. 326.

There is joy also in sorrow, and it is a very pure joy. There is infinitely more happiness in weeping with Mary at the foot of the cross, in uniting our sufferings with those of Jesus and of the *Mater Dolorosa*, than in rejoicing with the fortunate ones of this world. With Paul, we who are united to Mary will be able to say that we “exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.” We shall see this more clearly in the next chapter.

T2 Cor. 7:4.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Union With Mary in Suffering

Since the sin of our first parents, suffering is the heritage of all men. It affects the just as well as sinners. But if the just have sufficient faith, they will find relief in the midst of their suffering. What Catholic does not know that God has given Mary very special charge of bringing relief to those who suffer and that for this reason she is invoked under the title of "Comforter of the afflicted"?

When a child suffers, does it not run to its mother for comfort? And is Mary not for all—prince and pauper, saint and sinner alike—the tenderest and the most compassionate of mothers? How well she understands suffering, she who has suffered immensely more than all other mothers in the world! It does us good to weep at her side. We cannot leave her without feeling more peaceful, more resigned, stronger, and even happier.

At times we may rebel because we are, or believe we are, the victim of a crying injustice; but if we confide our indignation to Mary, we feel the tempest gradually subside. The Blessed Virgin shows our burdened heart the far more crying injustices which she, together with her Son, has willingly borne in silence for love of us.

Souls habitually united to Mary find, close to her, a special strength and consolation in their trials. Marie Consummata acknowledges:

Alone, I can accept nothing, I can will nothing, I cannot even love. But stay with me, O Jesus, my Jesus, in union of reparation. With thee, O Mother crucified, I wish to allow myself to be crucified, to be immolated, by the crucifying will of my Jesus. . . . I wish to let myself be purified, sanctified, remade even, and above all when I do not understand why.]

I Consummata (Pseudonym of Marie Antoinette de Gueser), *Lettres et Notes Spirituelles*. Introduction by P. Plus, S.J., p. 51.

Written in the same vein are these extracts from the biography of a young priest, a decided Marian soul. He offered himself as victim for the J. O. C., and our Lord again took him at his word. During his retreat of 1943 he wrote:

I have been afraid that Mary would ask of me a special sacrifice. Ordinary crosses, I said to myself, are quite sufficient for my strength. However, it seems to me that now I understand better that I have a mission to fulfill.

He took the following resolution:

On rising, I will say this prayer: All that thou wilt, O Mother. Send me today as many crosses as thou wilt. Help me to bear them! O Jesus, help me always to do the will of the Father.²³

In his spiritual work he applied himself to penetrating the mystery of suffering. He records his progress and makes this remark:

It seems that I am now beginning to see how suffering and obedience make me grow, how they free me from sin, divinize me, whereas before I had been tempted to see in them only a crushing of self. Contemplating the attitudes of Christ and of Mary has helped me much. . . .

Not long after this, an analysis of his blood showed that he was stricken with fatal leukemia. His superior, aware of his perfect submission to the will of God, was not hesitant about acquainting him with the situation. The young priest was not shocked by the news. One of his intimate friends relates:

When I learned the nature of Rene's sickness, I avoided making any allusion to his condition. But one day he himself told me that he knew he was condemned. Then I asked him what he experienced when they told him he would die, perhaps in the very near future. With his habitual smile, he replied: "George, I was overwhelmed with happiness."²⁴

Another consolation which Marian souls find in suffering is the prospect of being able to aid the Blessed Virgin in her coredemptive mission. It was this prospect which sustained the courage of M.

² *Apôtre de la Vierge et de la J.O.C., l'Abbé René Mougel, Marianiste*, E. Ncubert, p. 144.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

^{*} *Ibid.*, p. 147.

l'Abbé Mougel. He noted his progress in understanding the relationship between suffering and the salvation of souls and, as a consequence, made this resolution:

At the moment of rising in the morning and at the beginning of all my principal actions I will say: "O Jesus, O Mary, all that you will, and as you will it. I offer it to you for the salvation of the world." I will do the same whenever Mary invites me to make a particular sacrifice. First of all, though, I will say: "Thank you."⁵

The following lines were written by a person living in the world:

I must constantly remember to say: "I am all thine, O Mary, obtain for me the grace to be entirely thine." Whenever I think of saying this, it brings me happiness and gives me courage. When I am sad and burdened with cares, the thought of the Redemption immediately confers light and joy. To belong entirely to Mary is to be coredemptrix with her and like her, and this thought immediately changes the whole aspect of suffering. Sickly, dejected, dragging myself along with difficulty, and sad as I am, to reflect that I help Jesus in his Redemption, consoles me and gives me strength to love.

Common to all the citations above is the fact that Marian souls think rather naturally of uniting their sufferings with those of Jesus. This is only logical, seeing that the mission of Mary is to lead us to her Son.

A person closely united to Mary confided to her spiritual director that she was apprehensive at the prospect of crosses that might overwhelm her, for she felt herself so weak. The priest recommended the practice under discussion here. She replied:

I have adopted your principle: "When the trial comes, ask Mary to unite your sufferings to an analogous suffering of Jesus or of her own, and then you will be happy to suffer because you will be happy to love." That must be my program, and I acknowledge that it is a mark of predilection to have a cross to bear like that of Jesus, and I am happy to know that He is pleased to see me carry it. . . . My cross is not so heavy as that of others, but to realize that I am carrying it like Jesus and Mary makes a difference, and that is a grace for which I pray.

Sometimes the suffering surpasses the powers of endurance in human nature. Once more, recourse to Mary will make this suffering en-

**Ibid.*, p. 145.

durable. St. Theresa of the Child Jesus acknowledged to her sister just before her death:

Oh, if they knew what I suffer! I could not endure it more; I asked the Blessed Virgin to take my head in her hands so that I could support it.⁸

e Novissima verba, p. 144.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Union With Maiy and Love

Union intensifies love. It is true, of course, that we love some people better from afar than from close up, for absence idealizes qualities whereas contact reveals defects. But with persons really worthy of our esteem and affection, the more we are united to them, the more we love them. What, then, will be the effect of union with the creature whom God has made so very worthy of our esteem and love? As we live in closer union with Mary, we understand better what she is in herself, what she is in relation to Jesus and in relation to us, and, as a result, we feel an increasingly purer and more ardent love for her growth in our soul. It is the love of Jesus that loves His Mother through us.

The love of Marian souls for their heavenly Mother is not the only love that finds a marvelous increase in this union with her; their love for Jesus increases even more. All that we do for the Blessed Virgin brings us closer to Jesus, at least in an indirect way. Is it not because of Him that we love her, that we revere her, that we pray to her? Oftener, however, union with Mary puts us directly in contact with Jesus. Throughout all the chapters of this study we have seen how constantly we have had to speak of Him in speaking of her, and we shall see with even greater clarity in what follows that, thanks to her, we know Him better, serve Him better, and above all love Him better.

But that does not suffice for Mary. She wishes to do more than lead us to her Son without, as it were, our knowing it; she desires a determination on our part that is deliberate, freely consented to, and fully conscious.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, Mary was created and exists only for her Son. As formerly on earth, so now in heaven she thinks

only of giving Jesus to the world. To help her other children grow more and more in the love of Jesus and spread this love about them is her supreme desire in their regard. And the supreme desire of her earthly children must be to love and to have Jesus loved under the leadership of Mary, *Maria duce*.

But this objective must not be placed on a distant horizon, toward which we raise our eyes only rarely. We must, on the contrary, keep it constantly in sight. All those who have produced some great work — reformers, conquerors, geniuses, or saints — have kept constantly before them the ideal which inflamed them, and it was this that enabled them to triumph over all obstacles. He who pays too much attention to the means destined to lead to perfection — exercises of piety, the struggle against various defects, the practices of different virtues — runs the risk of being surprised by death before reaching the halfway mark in the ascent of the holy mountain. He who keeps his eyes constantly fixed upon Jesus advances by a route that is direct, short, infallible, steep perhaps in appearance, but where the attraction of the ideal lifts him as on wings. One of the reasons for the marvelous efficacy of devotion to Mary, especially of union with her, is precisely its power to keep Jesus constantly before our eyes. According to the word of St. Louis Mary de Montfort, "Mary has meaning only in relation to Jesus." We cannot serve her without serving Him.

As a result of living in union with Mary, we begin to think, to feel, and to desire as she does. The spirit of Mary, according to the thought of St. Ambrose, passes into those that live with her. But the thoughts, the sentiments, the resolutions of Mary are all orientated toward Jesus. To love Jesus with all the purity and ardor of Mary becomes the great preoccupation of the Marian soul.

Father Chaminade wrote to one of his most fervent disciples: "Union with our Lord or with the Blessed Virgin should spring from the heart rather than from the mind."¹ This is a profound truth from the theological as well as from the psychological point of view. Theologically, perfection consists not in knowing God but in loving Him, and to love someone means to wish him well. The good that we can wish for Mary is the union of our will with hers, a union that is always possible even when union of thought is not.

¹ M. Claude Mouchet, Nov. 9, 1836, *Lettres*, XV, p. 51.

But thanks to love, even a certain continuity of thought becomes psychologically possible. Though the essence of love consists in wishing good to the person loved, love does not reside solely in the element of volition; more often, it informs other elements. It acts upon the emotions, creating a deep satisfaction and joy that is ready to sacrifice every other joy. It expands the whole soul, fills it with enthusiasm and stimulates all its activities. It goes so far as to influence the whole organism and, if need be, it augments the strength of the body. We need but recall the ardent pages of the *Imitation of Christ* on the "Marvelous effects of divine love": "The loving heart takes wings, soars, hastens, thrills with joy; it is free and nothing restrains it. It gives all in order to have all, it possesses all in everything. . . . Love does not feel the burden, labor costs it nothing, it attempts more than it can do, and never alleges impossibility."²

Certainly we can love without always feeling these "marvelous effects." For Christ in the Garden of Olives and for Mary at the foot of the cross, love did not take wings, hasten, and thrill with joy. In trials of natural or of supernatural origin we sometimes must be satisfied with loving "at the fine point of the will." But normally, intense love reacts on the entire man. If, according to Plato, "we must strive for the truth with all our soul," then we must strive for the object we love not only with all our soul, but with our whole being, body and soul.

We turn our attention to many activities during the course of a day. It often happens, then, that while we are not concentrating on some object of our love, it still manages to make itself felt. We have, for instance, received news which fills us with joy. We then go about our usual work, perhaps even absorbing work. But during the whole occupation, even when we think no more of the happy news, we feel elated, and as soon as the work allows our mind a moment of relaxation, the thought of the good news returns immediately. In like manner, if before any action, even one which in itself may be tiresome, we see with Mary how we can give pleasure to Jesus and to her, the prospect fills us with joy. While we apply our mind to our task, that joy continues to act on our faculties and even on our nervous system, all the while leaving us with a sense of the presence of those for whom we are so happy to spend our energies. And at the

slightest pause in the work, our thoughts revert to those friends to refresh us in their love.

This psychological cause of constancy in union can be joined to a cause of the supernatural order: when I love Mary in the name of Jesus, it is truly Jesus who loves her in me. And when I love Jesus in the name of Mary it is truly, by a special grace, Mary who helps me love Him. And although generally this intensification and transformation of my love for Him or for her will not be conscious, they will be very real and will increase the power of my love to produce closer union.

Thus, in turn, union increases love and love increases union; and as purity of life and fervor continue to grow, union finally becomes almost constant and love attains a high degree of perfection.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Confiding Our Reflections and Impressions to Mary

In addition to the deep emotions that stir the soul from time to time, there are many other impressions of which we are less vividly aware but which affect us throughout the course of the day. The work that we do, the persons whom we see or of whom we think, the memories that return, the distractions that pass through our minds, the state of our health, or any of a multitude of other reactions impress themselves upon us, some vaguely, others acutely. Often these impressions evoke reflections that we make to ourselves or that we communicate to others. Should we also confide these impressions and reflections to Mary?

Why not? The saints did. They spoke to our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin, to the angels, and to the blessed in heaven with the same freedom, we might almost say with the same familiarity, as to the members of their family or their closest friends. "To have faith," said the Curé of Ars, "means to speak to God as if we saw Him." For the saints, not only spiritual exercises or important occupations, but every action, no matter how insignificant, and every sentiment, no matter how commonplace, was oriented toward God and impregnated with His love. It is precisely Mary's mission to teach us to orientate our lives in the same way.

Besides, the rule of our life is our Lord. Can we imagine that Jesus addressed His Mother only to invite her to pray to the Father or to discuss His future mission? Did He not speak to her of all that interested Him? And was He not interested in a multitude of things, or rather in all things, because all things interested the Father? There are saints who, in a spirit of penance and with a view to seeking God alone, try to belong no more to this world; only that which is beyond this world has any value for them. Our Lord,

however, took a lively interest in all that He met with in this world, because this world was the work of the Father, and the object of His solicitude, and because He had come to renew the bond between God and this world. While St. John the Baptist in his discourses chose only austere and frightening figures—vipers, rocks, the ax laid to the root of the tree, Jesus was pleased to adorn His speech with graceful images—flowers, birds, sheep, the shepherd, the sower, children who sing and dance. The spirit of the great saint of nature, Francis of Assisi, is only a copy of the spirit of his Master.

The images which adults use in their language are those which have struck them in their youth, in the age when impressions are strongest. John the Baptist grew up in the desert; there he encountered vipers, rocks, and dead trees. Jesus was reared by Mary; it was in her company that He observed those charming objects to which He alluded in His parables. Undoubtedly, after the manner of children, He would tell His Mother the impressions these things made on Him, for He was “tried as we are in all things except sin,”¹ and the communication of impressions and reflections of a child to its mother was for Him a natural need. What a delightful exchange of thoughts and sentiments there must have been between Christ and Mary on all they saw, heard, and did: the household managed by the Blessed Virgin, the wheat she ground between two large stones, the dough she kneaded and mixed with a little yeast to raise the whole mass, the games of the child, the services she rendered to Him, the labors and fatigues of St. Joseph. On occasion they talked of a neighbor's happiness upon finding her lost drachma; of the sparrows sitting on the roof of their little house and how none of them would fall from its perch without the permission of the Father; of the flowers in the fields, more magnificent in their simplicity than all the glory of Solomon, their illustrious ancestor. At other times they spoke of the sheep that meekly followed the shepherd or of the lost sheep carried back on his shoulders; of the wolves that came to attack the sheepfold and were driven off by the shepherd at the risk of his life. . . . These conversations were not prayers, but they were excellent occasions for Jesus and Mary to show mutual confidence and love, and to make their union ever closer.

After the example of Jesus we ought to talk over with our Mother

¹ Hcbr. 4:15.

all that interests us and happens to us in the course of a day. We can tell her about our work, the satisfaction we get from it, the fatigue that we feel; the ideas we encounter in reading or study and our reactions to them; the people around us, their habits, virtues, shortcomings, their attitude toward us. Often we would not care to tell these people what we are thinking, but we can easily tell our heavenly Mother. She will then help us realize that everyone is her child, our brother in Jesus, and will incline us to be understanding and charitable even toward those whom we are tempted to regard as eccentric or ill-willed. We can talk with her of our aches and pains or of our vigorous, good health; of our feelings of contentment or depression; of our enthusiasm or indifference, our optimism or pessimism. Even the haphazard ideas and images that flash through our consciousness when we are not concentrating on anything in particular can be profitably shared with Mary.

Obviously this talking to Mary about our impressions should be done in a rapid and natural manner. Fine phrases, unless they come spontaneously, and lengthy prayers are not necessary. A few words, often the single word *Mary* or *Mother*, or even a silent, interior glance will suffice. What is important is to think of Mary not as in an infinitely distant heaven, but as very close to us. Of course she sees us, hears us, and is ready to help us.

The advantages of communicating our passing reflections and impressions to Mary are numerous. This habit contributes to the intimacy and the continuity of our union with Mary; it makes it easier for us to communicate to her our strongest feelings and most difficult temptations; it helps us practice the spirit of faith by inducing us to do everything from the viewpoint of Mary, which is none other than the viewpoint of God; it engenders the spirit of evangelical childhood which is made up of humility, simplicity, and abandonment; it purifies the soul, fills it with generosity, sometimes leading it on to mystical union with Mary.

Union With Mary in General Activity

CHAPTER TWENTY

General Method

Union with Mary in thought, will, and sentiment would be merely a delusion if it did not culminate in union with her in act. The child of Mary wishes to give her everything, above all, his activity. This is quite natural; we think more readily of invoking the Blessed Virgin in our actions than of submitting to her our thoughts, emotions, and decisions.

Many practices can help us unite ourselves to Mary in our actions. In the chapter on the presence of Mary some of these have already been mentioned.¹ A rather common practice not already suggested is to place the words *Ave Maria* or the abbreviation *A.M.* at the top of each page that we write. Some religious have their pupils write the sentence: "O Mary, I offer you this page of my lesson." These practices are good, but care must be taken that routine does not empty them of their Marian intention.

It is well known that St. Louis Mary de Montfort recommends that his disciples perform all their actions through Mary, with Mary, and for Mary.² Of course, by these words the Saint indicates the habitual dispositions which should animate true servants of Mary rather than practices to recall before each action. The way to attain these dispositions is the frequent repetition of the formula: "I am all thine, O Mother, and all that I have is thine." The Saint also recommends casting a *glance* from time to time at the Blessed Virgin.

The desire to keep our union with Mary as constant as possible may tempt us to divide our attention between the work we are doing and the thought of Mary. The result, of course, is failure to do either thing well. We are like a student who attempts to listen to the

¹ Chapter Six.

² *Treatise on True Devotion*, Nos. 257-265.

teacher and at the same time to read a book; he draws no profit from either. Mary certainly does not wish to serve as a pretext for neglect of a duty of state.

It is by an altogether different way that we approach constant union with Mary during our work. This way was indicated in a preceding chapter in the words of Father Chaminade: union with our Lord and with the Blessed Virgin should proceed from the heart rather than from the mind. We must consider each action in its relation to the will of Jesus and Mary, how through each action we can promote their interests and show them our love. As a result, our interest in the activity will be sharpened, even to the point of enthusiasm, because we will see it as an opportunity to please Jesus and Mary. When actions are directly concerned with the glory of God, the cause of religion, the salvation of souls, it will be easy to accomplish them joyously, out of love for Jesus and Mary. But even when an action is mundane, or when it is some meaningless drudgery imposed on us, we can still make an act of love of it, by considering it as a cross to bear in union with Jesus for the redemption of souls and the success of our apostolate. The more clearly we see the relation between our act and the love of Jesus and Mary, the more facility will we acquire in accomplishing it with enthusiasm and love.

To that end we must, in our meditations, examens, retreats, and spiritual direction, learn to discover this relationship between our daily actions and our love for Jesus and Mary.

Practically, before each action we should ask Mary how to please Jesus most. She will make us sense this at once. We shall also ask her to enter into us with her love, her confidence, her availability, or her accessibility, according to the disposition needed to give the greatest pleasure to Jesus. Then the two of us, she and I, will do the work for Him.

If the action is to last for some time, we should try to foresee moments when we shall renew our initial dispositions. Some make these renewals each time the clock strikes. Such reminders may be useful during manual labor, but as a rule, to stop at regularly spaced intervals seems impractical. There is the risk of distraction at a moment when attention is particularly necessary. We should rather look for natural pauses in the course of the action. Any deed of some duration has natural divisions; upon the completion of some

portion of the work, we can easily relax a moment and reunite ourselves with Jesus and Mary.

Gradually we shall succeed in making these renewals more frequent and attain even a prolonged union by pronouncing lovingly the names of Jesus and Mary: Jesus, in the name of Mary; Mary, in the name of Jesus.³ Thus instead of merely labeling our actions with a Marian intention we Marianize and supernaturalize them completely.

An Intellectual's Testimony:

I have the habit of saying "Mother!" during my reading at every new idea. It is not a headache, not a foolish attempt to think at the same time of Mary and of totally different ideas, but a method, both energetic and restful, of profiting by what I read in maintaining interest and in appraising content, much as if I read a book in the presence of a friend more competent than I in the particular field covered. In this way I understand things better, I gauge them more accurately, I am more clearly aware of the truth or falsity of the ideas or feelings expressed. With Mary as confidante I have a different interest in my readings than when I read alone. In fact, if I fail to have her share the reading, I read more or less passively and superficially, and I am less interested in the topic. There is even a natural advantage in confiding everything to her: I am not confused and I do not lose time. I do the same when I write. Ideas and phrases come more spontaneously when two of us are writing. Besides, I delete less, I am more satisfied with my copy, and I notice that I proceed twice as fast.

If the work is more physical, or if I want to rest my mind, the slow, loving repetition of the names Jesus and Mary — when I am Mary loving Jesus, and Jesus loving Mary — permits me easily to remain in touch with Him and her. Sometimes for variety I sing a hymn to Jesus or Mary.

From the Spiritual Notes of a Religious:

Over the years I have taken the resolution to unite myself with Mary before and during every action. I made some progress but not much. I failed especially during ordinary work, or during moments when I was not myself, when I felt tired, thirsty, hot, cold, or indisposed. I almost despaired of ever advancing further toward a union which nevertheless seemed to me so advantageous.

Last December 8, the idea struck me, that really my way of acting

boiled down to thinking of Mary and to invoking her to help me perform *my* work well, whereas, having given myself entirely to her, my work was or should have been *her* work: there was question of her interests not of mine.

But the interests of Mary are the interests of Jesus. Mary lived on earth and lives in heaven only for her Son. The intentions of Mary about each of my actions are the glory of Jesus and the success of His work, and that holds not only for my directly religious and apostolic actions, but for everything I do, such as secular engagements, recreations, meals, and even for all that I feel, in health, sickness, heat, and cold. In all these situations I can and should help Mary to love Jesus and to extend His kingdom.

If I am thus for Mary a "supplementary human nature" to help her promote the interests of Jesus, I bring her great pleasure. I make my own that pleasure of my mother, and the joy of it enables me to do my work or to support any discomfort more easily: it keeps me alert to act only for and through Mary and Jesus. Since that day, my union with Mary and with Jesus has become much more intimate, more frequent, and I hope it will eventually become constant.

I CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Haste, the Great Obstacle

ALL obstacles to the supernatural life are obstacles to a life of union with Mary. One of these especially deserves our attention here, namely, haste. Haste is not one of those disordered tendencies of the soul, such as pride, jealousy, ambition, to which we attach ourselves by reason of the pleasure they cause. Haste is rather a physical defect, caused by nervousness to which we are in no wise attached, in which we find no pleasure, and which, on the contrary, we would sincerely like to be rid of. And so, many sincere, good people do not bother to struggle systematically against this defect, satisfied as they are on occasion to bemoan the inconvenience it causes. Yet, if we wish to reach perfection, particularly that of close union with Mary, we must learn to check haste at all times.

Haste prevents every natural and supernatural activity from producing its full effect. In regard to natural activity the inconveniences of haste are universally recognized. Almost every language has one or two proverbs which point up the harmful effects of haste, or which counsel calm and peace.¹ A person in a hurry performs a multitude of useless movements, grows tired, spoils his work, and is often obliged to do it over completely.

From the spiritual viewpoint the damage caused by haste is still more disastrous. Whoever is precipitate is subject to incessant distractions; only the calm man is able to keep the eye of the soul

¹In English: "Haste makes waste." In French: "Hâtez-vous lentement," a translation of the Latin: "Festina lente." In German: "Elle mit Weile," has the same meaning; and "Erst wags, dann wag's," is the equivalent of the English, "First weigh, then dare." In Italian: "Chi va piano va sano va lontano" — "He who goes moderately goes securely and goes far." In Spanish: "Con alma y calma," with spirit and calm. "Viste me despacio que estoy de prisa" — "Dress me slowly, because I am in a hurry." In Polish: "What is done through haste is done for the devil."

fixed upon supernatural realities. Hence, the impetuous person hardly knows what intimate contact with God is. Such a person is rarely directed by the Holy Spirit who speaks softly and is inaudible amid agitation. Consequently, that person never arrives at perfect charity; for haste is the work of nature, and it can insinuate itself into even the holiest actions. The hasty person does not have constancy in that generosity which makes saints. He might be very generous by temperament and at certain moments may be capable of heroic acts, but he will be generous only intermittently. Any action accomplished with all possible perfection paves the way for the performance of the following action with even greater perfection, and the constancy inherent in this manner of proceeding results in marked progress within a short time. Such progress is possible only to the soul that possesses itself in peace. The hasty person follows up one generous action with at least some negligent ones; he never builds upon his advances and so never makes lasting progress. The reason that there are not more saints among devout souls is less perhaps because of a want of generosity than because of a lack of calm and peace of soul.

Haste prevents full fruitfulness in apostolic enterprises. The impetuous person is in a hurry to execute an idea as soon as it presents itself, and is in just as much of a hurry to abandon it; he speaks before he thinks, acts imprudently, and compromises the success of the finest work.

Tranquillity, though not a virtue, is the indispensable condition of holiness and of full apostolic fruitfulness. It is difficult to imagine a genuine saint acting impetuously. "The spirit of God is very active," said Father Chaminade, "but it is not precipitate."²³ Mother de Trenquellleon, cofoundress of the Daughters of Mary, wrote of Father Chaminade to one of her daughters: "See how Father Chaminade acts: he does not hurry, he is always calm, and yet he accomplishes much, because grace does much in him."⁸

Haste causes the same havoc to union with Mary that it causes to spiritual life in general.

For the hurried man there is no intimate union with Mary in spiritual exercises. He forgets to place himself in her presence before

² *Lettres*, tome IV, p. 436.

³ *Guillaume Joseph Chaminade*, by the Very Rev. Joseph Simler, 1902, p. 421.

praying or meditating. Or, after placing himself in her presence, he soon forgets about the sentiment, which is only superficial anyhow.

For him there is no intimate union with her in his ordinary occupations. He begins them automatically without thinking of offering them to her, and during his work he is too absorbed to raise his eyes to her.

For him there can be no intimate union of will. He cannot stop for a moment to consider the intentions of Mary to act according to her will. For him consultation with Mary is impossible: either he will not submit his ideas to her or he will not wait for her response.

For him there is no intimate union of sentiments. It costs him too much to spend a moment in telling his feelings to his mother. Besides, he is too agitated to enjoy the profound peace of her company.

How can we overcome this deadly defect? There are natural and supernatural ways. Here we shall consider only the Marian means, namely, the imitation of Mary and recourse to her.

In general, we should imitate her modesty—her bearing, her manner of walking, speaking, and working. She certainly must have done much work without ever hurrying. We should contemplate her, recollected and absorbed in the thought of God whose tabernacle she is, and who dwells in us also. Modesty establishes peace.

We should also imitate her spirit of order. Without the least doubt, there was perfect order and neatness in the home at Nazareth. We lack order because we are too much in a hurry to place objects where they belong. Like modesty, order establishes peace.

Before each action, we should recollect ourselves for a moment close to our Mother, to see how, with her, we can give the greatest possible joy to Jesus. We should not yield to that feverish impulse which prompts us to begin something before receiving her approval. No matter how holy the action, we must not throw ourselves blindly into it, but we should talk about it for a moment with our heavenly councilor. Was there ever a holier proposition than the one which Gabriel brought to Mary in God's name? Notice how calmly she deliberates and how simply she replies: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." Then only does she rise without delay to bring divine joy to the house of her cousin.

During the action, at the natural divisions, we should look at her, pronounce her name, and renew ourselves in the disposition of acting peacefully with her for Jesus' sake.

Should we feel hurried, we can perhaps pause a moment to re-establish our serenity close to Mary. Generally, however, this is not the most effective tactic; the interruption will vex us, nervousness will drive us on despite ourselves. A quick glance at Mary to see how she would act in our place to cause Jesus pleasure is sufficient. And then on with the action, a bit more slowly perhaps, in order to fix our whole attention on what we are doing. But it should be a calm, loving attention. There is no valid pretext for not giving our whole attention to the action in hand; the less time we have, the more important it is to possess ourselves entirely and not to lose an instant.⁴ As soon as we feel that our soul is in full possession of itself and acting again in the name of Mary, we go faster and do more useful work than we would without taking time out.

Consider this remark in the spiritual notebook of a very busy priest:

When I have many urgent jobs I am tempted to cast only a distracted glance toward Mary, instead of trying to act in her name. I have found this a bad business. When I deliberately try to be Mary doing the good pleasure of her Son, I am perfect master of myself and I soon can go ahead with my work more perfectly than when I do not have the time to begin in her name. Especially when I have little time I ought to say: Be careful; you have so much to do; let her take over so that you will be able to do it all.

Here is the experience of another busy person:

It is unbelievable how working with Mary makes a task easier. That is what I ask her every day before work which taxes my capacity. Then I am not discouraged; I know that I will achieve my purpose. . . .

My days are full. On that account I do not omit my religious practices. One day at Mass I recovered my calm by asking the Blessed Virgin for hers. That was revolutionary. After Mass I was a changed man, and since that time I always ask her to work with me.

There are circumstances when our nerves are so agitated that the means mentioned above do not meet the need. In such a case, whenever possible we should find something else on which our nervous energy can spend itself. That restores the feverish pace of our activity to a regular rhythm. We may report our haste to the Blessed Virgin*

⁴ Note the remark of a surgeon to his assistant in an urgent operation: "Do not hurry so much; we haven't a second to lose."

and with her we can then smile at our senseless hurry. At least interiorly we may hum a soothing melody to our Lady or to our Lord. We may transport ourselves to the heights of heaven, where the noise of this earth does not reach, where we can unite our voice to that of the Blessed Virgin and the angels, chanting slowly, solemnly, and in a profound sentiment of abasement: *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui sancto, sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum, Amen!*

A final suggestion sums up all the others: We should aim always at “doing what we are doing,” under the direction of Mary. *Age quod agis, Maria duce!*

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Another Obstacle, Distractions

The word “distraction” generally denotes those extraneous thoughts and images that steal in upon us during prayer and spiritual exercises. But distractions also disturb other occupations: to daydream during work, to let our thoughts wander aimlessly, those too are distractions. It is obvious that in every occupation, whether worldly or religious, distractions spoil the work or at least prevent a “perfect” job.

Distraction is lack of attention to what ought to occupy us. We distinguish between spontaneous and voluntary attention. The former is evoked by the interest which the action arouses; the latter is commanded by the will. Hence, spontaneous attention is produced quite naturally and does not cause fatigue unless too prolonged or steady; voluntary attention is intermittent and requires efforts which quickly become painful.

The way to assure continuity of attention or absence of distraction is to find a gripping center of interest for each of our actions.

To a soul entirely given to God the great center of interest is love, the love of Jesus and, because of Jesus, the love of Mary and souls. To suppress every distraction as much as is possible to our fickle minds, it suffices to be animated in each action with a great love for Jesus, for Mary, and for souls. Thus the saints animated by this triple love were generally exempt from at least lengthy distractions. We shall approximate their achievement if we constantly endeavor so to perform our actions that in union with Mary we give the maximum of glory to Jesus.

This result will be attained more rapidly and more perfectly if we suppress centers of self-interest by which we risk neutralizing or at least diminishing the power of actions motivated by love of our Lord. That is why the practice of interior and exterior silence, of modesty

and of recollection is recommended in all methods of asceticism. Father Chaminade called these dispositions "virtues of preparation." He made an original study of them and strongly impressed their necessity and practice upon his disciples. The first three chapters of the second book of the *Imitation of Christ* speak of the necessity of these dispositions: "Interior conversation of the faithful soul with Jesus . . . Truth speaks within us without any noise of words. . . . We must listen to the words of God with humility and many do not appreciate them as they should." According to the teaching of St. Ignatius, we would be surprised to know the degree of holiness to which we could rise if we allowed God to take possession of us and to act freely in us. When we make no effort to be recollected, we do not allow God to work freely within us. If so many souls aspiring to perfection dally their lives away on the lower slopes of the mountain, far from the heights that attract them, it is less from a lack of generosity than from a lack of the interior spirit. They would be generous if they knew how to be interior; if they were recollected, they would feel themselves close to Jesus, and close to Him no sacrifice seems too hard.

We should begin then by applying ourselves to the "virtues of preparation," copying them from our Lord under the direction of Mary. With her, we will contemplate, admire, and love the silence of the divine Master, His modesty, His serenity of soul, and we will endeavor to reproduce these virtues. We will look also at Mary to see how she must have imitated the dispositions of her Son. As we contemplate these models, and seek to penetrate with supernatural sympathy into the heavenly recollection which filled their souls and shone over their whole exterior, we shall come to love silence and modesty; we shall live in the intimate sanctuary of the divinity which a faithful soul really is; we shall be at peace with God and be ready for truly spiritual work.

The distractions which ordinarily annoy us most are those which assail us during spiritual exercises. Having begun these exercises in a loving and confident union with Jesus and Mary, we shall not be troubled by distractions. While it is true that our mind may stray, so long as we do not retract our initial disposition by culpable negligence our Mother continues to speak to God for us. Quietly, we can return to God by an act of the will, not alone, however, but *with Mary*.

With her our task is easier, for she is a stronger center of interest than any distraction can be. When we attempt to return to our subject by an act of will, it is we who act. But when we come back to Mary first, it is she who acts through us. It requires only a glance or the word "Mary" to return to her, and with her, to our subject.

In our vocal prayers, we must not try to follow the exact meaning of all the words. Each prayer expresses one or several sentiments; the words are only means to that end. To each sentiment there corresponds an attitude of soul, an attitude of confidence, of regret, of love, etc. We must assume these attitudes. Thus, for instance, the first part of the Our Father supposes an attitude of devotion to the interests of God; the second part, a supplication for our needs. The first part of the Hail Mary supposes an attitude of loving veneration for the Mother of Jesus; the second, one of humble supplication. It is easier for us, and also much more profitable, to take, with Mary, the attitude required by the part of the prayer we are reciting, than to pay attention to the meaning of each word. The presence of Mary will immediately induce in us the sentiment of humility, of trust, of love, or of regret—to Jesus, to the Father, or to the Most Holy Trinity, as the case may be.

A frequent cause of distraction in mental prayer is negligence in preparation. Another cause is an attempt on our part to make of prayer a soliloquy instead of a conversation with Jesus and Mary.

In like manner, we generally have more distractions in particular examen when we make it a solitary inquiry instead of a conversation with Jesus and Mary on what we have done and on what we propose to do.

During spiritual exercises, above all during mental prayer and particular examen, a special kind of distraction may arise. Often during these moments the solution to a problem which we have been seeking in vain flashes upon the mind. It is natural that this happens, because of the tranquillity at the time of prayer. However, we are confronted with a dilemma: should we banish the thought and risk losing the new view of the problem, or should we pursue further a subject foreign to our prayer? The proper procedure is to arrange with the Blessed Virgin the first free moment after the exercise in order to deal with the discovery so as to liberate the mind now and allow it to continue the divine interview. If that does not suffice, let us remind

ourselves that to be occupied with something contrary to the will of God may perhaps assure a natural success. It will, however, surely compromise supernatural success. With Mary it is easy to reconcile the interests of earth with those of heaven.

Distractions can serve as an excellent spiritual psychoanalysis to reveal our camouflaged tendencies. According as our ordinary or our most persistent distractions are caused by vanity, jealousy, sensuality, or the like, we may be certain that that is the tendency or one of the tendencies against which we have to fight an all-out war to live fully the life of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Meals, Recreation and Rest

We find it natural to introduce the thought of Mary into occupations that are part of our duties of state. It is not so natural during meals, recreation, and rest. These are moments of peace for mind and body when we accord a little respite to nature. Still, we have excluded nothing from our total donation to Mary. Did not St. Paul recommend to the Corinthians: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the glory of God"?¹ Is it not in union with Mary that we give this glory most perfectly?

And have we not a special reason to recall the thought of the Blessed Virgin at these moments? Nature, always ingenious in finding hidden compensation for sacrifices imposed upon it, finds here a very propitious opportunity to satisfy itself under cover of the will of God, who desires that, from time to time, we rest to repair our strength.

The method of living in union with Mary during these times has been explained in several preceding chapters. In general:

We should from time to time turn toward Mary and remain under her loving regard.

With her, we should propose to glorify God by accomplishing His will and to give pleasure to Jesus.

We should recall also that rest and nourishment are necessary to serve Mary in her maternal mission with souls. What victories would soldiers gain if they neglected to eat and rest? We are soldiers of Mary.

During meals, it is good to impose some privation on ourselves, in order not to become attached to the pleasures of the body, and in order to offer sacrifices for the salvation of souls.*

¹ 1 Cor. 10:31.

In moments of recreation with others, we should try to forget self in order to please Mary by pleasing her other children. If we are alone, let us profit by the occasion to recite some prayer to the Blessed Virgin, to pronounce her name and that of Jesus with love, to share with them our reflections and impressions. Do we not find the best relaxation in the company of persons whom we love?

For sleep, we could follow the counsel of Father Chaminade: at each waking moment during the night recite the invocation, "May the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be glorified in all places by the Immaculate Virgin Mary!" There are persons who fall asleep under the eyes of their Mother and who discover her maternal smile again the moment they awake.

Union With Mary During Spiritual Exercises

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

During Prayers Not Addressed to the Blessed Virgin

We have already treated of union with Mary in prayers addressed directly to her.¹ As we grow in intimacy with our heavenly Mother the number of these prayers will grow proportionately. However—and this goes without saying—the frequency of our contacts with Mary does not increase at the expense of our relations with God—far from it! Hence, the most important part of our prayers is addressed to our Lord, to the Father, or to the Holy Ghost.

Still, Mary will not be absent from these prayers. We have consecrated our entire activity to her, and our spiritual exercises constitute a particularly sacred part of this activity. Besides, experience teaches us quickly that we accomplish with greater perfection all that we do with her, and our spiritual exercises above all ought to be accomplished as perfectly as possible.

How does Mary enter into the prayers we address to God? In two ways.

First of all, because of the Marian end which we propose to ourselves. Since we have made ourselves the property of Mary, our intentions are no longer our own; they have become Mary's. In each prayer we really ask for the accomplishment of her intentions in regard to that prayer.

Second, because she is our Mother. We do not know how to pray, but she knows how; and if she prays with us, by that very fact we pray well. Is not this the way mothers teach their children how to speak with God? They kneel beside their children, join the little hands, and slowly recite the sacred formulas, coaxing their darlings to imitate them. Children quickly learn what it means to pray, because,

¹ Chapter Two, Chapter Four.

through close physical proximity, a mother's dispositions pass into them by a kind of sympathy. Thus the dispositions of the heavenly Mother become the dispositions of her children when they invite her to come and pray with them.

No matter what the object of our prayer, we may be sure that in union with Mary we are more recollected, more intimate, more confident, and more loving.

Knowing that she is at our side, we share her recollection. Besides, the intimacy, the confidence, and the love that accompany union with Mary singularly facilitate our attention. Thus, experience shows that when we forget to invoke Mary before going to God, our mind is distracted more quickly. On the contrary, if we go to Him with her, the eyes of the soul remain fixed upon Him much longer and much more steadily.

At Mary's side we are more at ease during prayer. In her company we sense that we are more in the family of God. Generally we are at ease with Jesus in the Eucharist, in the crib, or on the cross. But Jesus in Palestine is in danger of remaining far off like an historical personage, and Jesus, the Son of God, is almost an abstraction. The Father is too often the Father who is in heaven—more in heaven than Father. And the Holy Spirit for many is even more ethereal than the Father and the Son.

Intimacy with Mary leads us gradually to greater intimacy with the Son and then to greater intimacy with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as we shall see later on. Then we realize that we are children of an infinitely loving Father and sanctuaries of the Holy Ghost, and the time comes when we are as much at ease with the Father and the Holy Spirit as with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, or Jesus crucified.

At Mary's side we pray with more confidence. First, because there we feel more recollected, more like children of the Father, more like brothers of the Son, more like temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore more worthy—or less unworthy—of being heard. Second, we pray with more confidence because of the intimate conviction that our prayers, no matter how poor, are agreeable to God since they are presented by her who is infinitely dear to Him and whose requests never meet with a refusal. Finally, and above all, we pray with more confidence because having given ourselves to her entirely and acting

no longer except in her name, our intentions in every prayer can be only her intentions. Mary's intentions are always conformable to the will of God and consequently always realized.

At Mary's side we pray with more love. Here especially, we see in operation the law of psychological sympathy which accounts for the union of sentiments between a mother and her child placed next to her. It is impossible to remain cold when we realize that one who is all love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is praying close to us. We feel her love penetrate our poor heart and communicate some of her warmth. Besides, being more recollected, more intimate, more confident, thanks to her, we are better disposed to understand the love of God for us, and better disposed to respond to it with our own love.

Every particular prayer expresses a special sentiment: faith, hope, regret, desire.... When we pray with our Mother all these sentiments are, by that fact, purified and intensified. Close to her our faith becomes more ardent, our hope more firm, our humility more profound, our hatred of sin more vivid, our purposes of amendment more sincere, our sorrow more resigned, our joy more pure. As in the case of love, it is as if a little of Mary's soul passed into our own and mingled with our prayer to make it her own. Formerly we repeated these acts without attention or devotion, as empty formulas. Now that we say them with Mary, however, we find them filled with a richness of thought and sentiment which we never suspected possible before. By these formulas the soul feels truly in living and vivifying contact with the divinity. That is because Mary is associated with us.

All this does not mean to imply that prayers said with the Blessed Virgin are completely filled with consolations. Dryness and coldness may be found even in these prayers. But the soul always remains convinced that prayers recited with Mary and offered by her to God please Him because it is she who presents them. And as long as He finds His satisfaction, what does it matter whether we find ours or not? Hence in this union with Mary, even in the midst of dryness, we always experience a sense of intimate peace and satisfaction.

Before each prayer, we must try to place ourselves for an instant in the presence of Mary, and then with her in the presence of those whom we are about to address, try to make our own the sentiments of the Blessed Virgin toward them. We should renew ourselves in this dis-

position from time to time. Thus we learn little by little to identify ourselves with her in all our prayers, never to pray any more except in her name, to the extent that we can repeat: "It is no longer I who pray, but Mary who prays through me."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Union With Mary and Devotion to the Eucharist: Motives

Eucharistic devotion immeasurably excels all other acts of the virtue of religion. If interior souls love to associate Mary with all their manifestations of piety to God, how eagerly they will introduce her into their devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for it is obvious that the Blessed Virgin plays a unique role in this devotion.

First of all, the Eucharist is the Son of God become Son of the Virgin Mary in order to serve as the nourishment of our soul. Here we are again in direct contact with that Christ whom the Blessed Virgin gave to the world and whom it is her mission to give to the world until the end of time. We always go “to Jesus through Mary”; like the Magi, we find “the Infant with Mary, His Mother.”

The Eucharist is not directly the human soul of Christ, still less His divinity; it is His body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine. Undoubtedly, in virtue of the hypostatic union, the divinity and the human soul of Christ with His body form only one person, and this person is the Son of God become the Son of Mary. Whether we address Jesus as the wonder-worker or as the teacher, it is to Jesus the Son of Mary that we speak. Though Jesus does not receive from Mary His power to cure the sick or to preach a divine doctrine, still it is directly from Mary that He receives the flesh and blood with which He nourishes us in the Eucharist.

Hence, if in other mysteries of Christ the thought of Mary does not necessarily present itself to the mind, in the Eucharist the thought of her imposes itself upon us through an almost inevitable association. *Ave verum corpus, natum de Maria Virgine* — “Hail, true body, born of the Virgin Mary,” we chant, and the Church terminates all its

hymns in the office of Corpus Christi with the doxology borrowed from the very office of the Blessed Virgin: *jesu, tibi sit gloria qui natus es de Virgine*, "Glory to Thee, O Jesus, who art born of the Virgin."

Second, the Eucharist recalls the mystery of the Redemption and continues it. At its institution Jesus said to His disciples: "This is my body which is being *given for you*. . . . This is the cup of the new covenant *in my blood which shall be shed for you*."¹ The words "given for you, shed for you," are an evident allusion to the mystery of the Passion which was to begin only an hour later. The mystery of the Eucharist is then a mystery of the death of Christ offered for our Redemption.

But no one is ignorant of the fact that the Coredemptrix took part in the mystery of the Redemption. Can we imagine the drama of Calvary without seeing the Mother of Sorrows at the foot of her crucified Son? Can we penetrate the meaning of the Eucharistic mystery without thinking of the Blessed Virgin?

The purpose of the Eucharist requires the same co-operation of the Blessed Virgin. Our Saviour Himself noted for us the direct end of the Eucharist when He promised this gift of gifts at Capharnaum: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day." In the designs of God, as recalled clearly by St. Pius X, the Eucharist is to play an exceptional role in our lives. "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."²

To live the life of Jesus means first of all to possess the state of grace. It means also to grow in grace so as to take on little by little the dispositions of Christ Jesus. In imitation of the mysterious transformation, of the transubstantiation operated by the word which the priest pronounces over the bread and wine, the reception of the body and blood of Jesus produces in the faithful a transformation — one could almost say, a transubstantiation. Like the consecrated host, the communicant remains exteriorly what he was before, but interiorly

¹ Lk. 22:19-20.

² Jn. 6:54-58.

he has undergone a change; it is no longer he who lives, but it is Christ who lives in him.

Mary directs the transformation of each one of us into Jesus. Since she is our true Mother, she should rear us, and to rear us means to make us in all things like our elder brother, Jesus. The maternal mission of the Blessed Virgin is to teach us gradually how to think, feel, will, and act like Him. More truly than St. Paul, she can say to us: "My dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you."³

How will she succeed in thus "transubstantiating" us into Jesus? In general, through grace; and we know that no grace is given to us except through her. But she will "transubstantiate" us in a particularly efficacious manner by the grace of graces, by the gift of Jesus Himself, the Eucharist. Every mother nourishes her child with her substance, with her blood, through her milk. The Eucharist is also, in a way, the substance of our mother, but her substance divinely transformed into a nourishment of marvelous richness. It is by the Eucharistic grace, better than by any other grace, that our ideal educator succeeds in infusing into us the dispositions of her Son so as to arrive at — one might say — identifying us with Him. Therefore, how she must desire us to grow in devotion to the Eucharist! And how she furthers our relations with Jesus in His sacrament of love!

From now on, what will be our relations with Mary in our devotion to the Eucharist?

First of all, we shall have to ask her assistance, as in all other manifestations of our supernatural life. In view of the exceptional importance of devotion to the Eucharist, this request for help must be pressing and trustful.

Then, we will not stop requesting help; we will try to enter into her dispositions toward the mysteries which the Eucharist recalls and continues. Sharing the dispositions of our Mother becomes a reality almost necessarily as soon as we understand the mysteries taking place and the part Mary has in them. Once we thoroughly grasp the meaning of the actions and prayers in which we are taking part, we quite naturally begin to contemplate the Eucharist with the eyes of Mary, to love it with her heart, and to unite ourselves to it, one with her.

³ Gal. 4:19.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Union With Mary and Participation in Holy Mass

“In its essence, the sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the sacrifice of Calvary. And God has willed, freely and truly, that Mary should take part in the sacrifice of Calvary. She was to be Coredemptrix with her Son and as such she was to offer to the heavenly Father the same victim as He, by renouncing her maternal rights over Him and by uniting her will, intentions, and sufferings with the will, intentions, and sufferings of Christ. Thus by a divine decree, the oblation of Mary constitutes an integral part of the sacrifice of Calvary.

“A Mass from which Mary would be excluded would no longer be completely the sacrifice of Calvary; it would be a mutilated sacrifice. Let man not separate what God has joined together!

“In heaven Mary keeps the dispositions she had on Calvary. She remains united to her Son who offers Himself on the altar; she wills the oblation of the victim whose mother she always remains; she wills it with the same intentions as her Son.

“The sacrifice of the Mass *applies the merits* acquired by the sacrifice of the cross. All merits were acquired once for all on Calvary. The sacrifice of the Mass does not acquire new merits; it applies to each soul in particular what was merited for all in general on Calvary, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent.

“But Mary is the Distributrix of all the graces merited on Calvary. She has therefore a special role to play in the Mass, which is the act by which merits are distributed most abundantly.

“On Calvary Mary brings us forth to the divine life. At each Mass this grace of divine and Marian filiation is applied to us more and more.[»]^l

In order to share with St. John the Apostle the dispositions of the

^l *Marie et Notre Sacerdoce*, E. Neubcrt, Editions Spes, pp. 211-213.

Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross, before the Holy Sacrifice begins we should recollect ourselves with Mary in order to be penetrated, in her presence, with the truth that the drama of Calvary is actually to be reproduced on the altar.² With her we prepare to offer to the Father His well-beloved Son, as victim for the world, and we offer ourselves in union with that divine victim.

The Mass properly speaking begins with the Offertory. Up to that point, the prayers are merely preparatory. Some of them refer to God in general or to the Holy Trinity, others to the feast of the day. The confession at the foot of the altar is intended to purify us. In the Kyrie Eleison we beg the three divine Persons to have mercy on us. We glorify the Holy Trinity in the Gloria, and profess our faith in the three Persons in the Credo. Through the Virgin most pure, we purify ourselves; through the Virgin mediatrix, we ask for graces; with the chantress of the Magnificat, we glorify God; with the Mother proclaimed blessed for having believed, we affirm our faith. With her also we recite the Epistle, the Gospel, and the Collects which refer to the saint—one of her children—whom the Church honors on that day.

Then comes the oblation. The divine sacrifice is offered directly to the heavenly Father. What is more natural, since it is the Son who is being offered? We thus address the Father, just as the Mother of Sorrows addressed the Father in offering her Son.

The Offertory is the presentation of the future victim. It is like recalling the presentation of Jesus in the temple by the hands of Mary. Undoubtedly, in that hour of joy and sorrow, Mary offered herself together with her Son. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." To enter into her intentions we will beg her to offer us to the heavenly Father also, as little hosts alongside the larger Host, so as to constitute as she did only one victim with Christ.

Is it not the intention of the Church to recall here that union with Christ is our end, that we are like the little drop of water mixed with the wine, the drop which is lost in the wine only to be transubstantiated into the blood of Christ? May it please God in this sacrifice to make us partakers of the divinity of Jesus who, in the womb of Mary, became participant of our humanity.

² "Take only what suits you."

Earnestly and humbly we beg God to receive our offering. While presenting it to the Holy Trinity we do it expressly by command of the Church, "to honor the Blessed Mary ever Virgin," and other saints, praying them to intercede for us.

Before beginning the divine sacrifice itself, we consider it necessary to give thanks to the Father through Jesus Christ His Son for all the benefits He has lavished upon us through Him. We intone the preface and she who formerly improvised the most marvelous song of gratitude ever chanted, unites her voice with ours to offer the Father a hymn of thanksgiving "truly worthy and just."

Then we formulate our general intentions for the Church, the Pope, our Bishop, for all the living and dead, that is to say, for the entire family of Mary. And we add our special intentions which we ask Mary to present to the heavenly Father, according to her views and not ours, and to join to them her own personal intentions.

Again the Church recalls that in this divine sacrifice we are in communion with the saints, "and in the first place with the glorious and blessed Mary, ever Virgin, Mother of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ," and that we must here venerate her memory with that of the Apostles and of all the saints, and implore their assistance before God.

The most solemn of all moments arrives. Surrounded by a mysterious silence the priest says slowly: "This is my body." The Word made flesh dwells among us, the Son of God appears on the altar as the Son of Mary. The priest continues: "This is the chalice of my blood, of the new and eternal covenant—a mystery of faith—which shall be shed for you and for a great number." The Blood of Christ is present, mysteriously separated from His body, in order to continue His death as Saviour. Because she was on Calvary, Mary is present, too, although in a different manner. And we are present with Him and with her. . . .

The oblation of the divine victim continues more urgently, more solemnly. Jesus remains before us in His crucified state until the moment of communion, just as He hung on the cross for three hours before His Mother, offering Himself to the Father in union with her. In union with her we continue to offer Him to the Father for the living and the dead and, particularly, for the sublime intentions of the Saviour Himself in the prayer which He taught us. Because we

know that Mary is close by, we have the firm confidence that the name of the Father will be more perfectly “hallowed,” that His kingdom shall more surely come, and that His will shall be accomplished more generously on earth as it is in heaven.

For the third time since the Offertory, the sacred liturgy has us implore the intercession of “the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, Mother of God,” together with that of the Apostles and the saints, in order to obtain deliverance more completely from all evil, and the fullness of the peace of Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Mary and Holy Communion

We interrupt our conversation with the Father to turn directly to the Son, for we are about to receive the divine Victim as Holy Communion.

When Jesus hung on the cross perhaps some drops of His blood fell upon Mary, John, or Magdalen. How fortunate for them! But how much greater will be our own good fortune! It is not a drop of His blood, but all of His blood with His entire body, Jesus Himself, that will be our portion. It is a mystery of faith, a mystery of hope, and above all a mystery of love. Close to Mary, our faith becomes truly living, our hope most firm, our love all aflame.

Jesus descends into us. It is like the mystery of the Incarnation renewed again for each one of us. In some way we share the happiness which the Blessed Virgin enjoyed when the Son of God came to dwell in her virginal womb. How can we do without her at a moment, when, poor as we are, we feel so keenly the need of someone who could help us with an immeasurable love?

But holy Mass is a renewal not so much of the Incarnation as of the Redemption. We receive Jesus the Host, that is, Jesus the Victim. He comes to make us like Himself, hence a victim offered for the glory of the Father and for the salvation of the world. It is not the sweetness of Communion which we should seek but our identification with Christ immolated. "He who eats me," he says, "will live by me." To live by Him means to share the dispositions of Him who came to be sacrificed. How can we yield more readily to this divine and painful transformation than under the auspices of our Mother, and with her co-operation?

In the final prayers of the Mass we again address the Father, but henceforth united more closely with the Son and the Mother. We

pray the Holy Trinity to accept our sacrifice and to bless us. *Placeat tibi, sancta Trinitas. . . .* We terminate the Mass by the recitation of the sublime evangelical text which reminds us of the divinity and of the Incarnation of the Word come to dwell with us and in us; of that Word whom we, far from rejecting as many of His own did, have just lovingly received, and who wishes to give us even more fully the power to become sons of God.

The Holy Sacrifice is finished; but our interview with Jesus continues, intimate, confident, familiar, loving. Undoubtedly the Mother is still there, she who has just given us her Son. She helps us to praise, thank, petition, promise, and, above all, to love. Among the foremost graces for which we thank Jesus is that He created Mary so pure and beautiful, so humble and great, so gentle and powerful, so happy and dolorous, so forgetful of self, so ready to sacrifice herself; Mary, His lowly servant and associate in all His sublime functions, with Him the Reparatrix of the honor of the Father and the Coredemptrix of the human race, His Mother and our Mother—a mother to me, poor sinner!

The first grace we ask for is the full realization of the intentions of Mary, particularly those regarding ourselves and all persons dear to us; then, a more complete participation in the filial piety of our elder Brother toward her; finally, an ever wider diffusion of the knowledge and love of Mary among men. Instinctively the prayer of St. Anselm will form on our lips: “O good Jesus, by the love with which Thou lovest thy Mother, grant I beseech Thee, that I also may truly love her as Thou truly lovest her and desirest her to be loved.”

For sufficient reason Holy Communion may be received at other times than at the Communion of the Mass. The indications given above apply without difficulty to the reception of Jesus as Host in any circumstance. It is important that we always partake of the Body of Christ not for personal consolation or to perform a meritorious spiritual exercise, but to share more fully in the dispositions of Jesus Christ immolated for us.¹

¹ There are other excellent methods of uniting with Mary in the reception of Holy Communion, particularly that recommended by St. Louis Mary de Montfort in his *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary*, Nos. 266-273.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Mary and Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and Spiritual Communion

JESUS does not leave us at the end of the Holy Sacrifice. He remains in our tabernacles day and night in order to offer His prayers for us and to receive ours. Why should we not visit Him, if in any way possible? It is the same Jesus whom the shepherds of Bethlehem went to contemplate the first Christmas night, the same whom the Magi came to adore from afar at great sacrifice. St. Matthew says that "they found the Child with Mary his Mother." We, too, shall find Him with her. More even than at Bethlehem she will rejoice to receive loving visitors to the poor dwelling of her Son, when so many others, pretending to have the faith, having received Him perhaps that very morning, pass by as indifferent as if it were the dwelling of a stranger.

We must ask our Mother to help us relate to Jesus our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and our disappointments. Through her we shall renew ourselves in the dispositions that were ours at Holy Communion; and with her we shall see how we can cause Him pleasure until the next visit.

We shall unite ourselves with her particularly in adoring our Lord exposed on the altar. The *ostensorium* or *monstrance*, as the name indicates, shows us Him whom we daily ask the Blessed Virgin to show us: "*et fesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis . . . ostende* and show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Hence also, the piety of the faithful is pleased to insert between the O *Salutaris* and the *Tantum Ergo*, which are addressed to the Son, the *Ave Maria* or some other hymn in honor of Mary.

Another salutary Eucharistic practice from which we can profit without even going to church is spiritual communion. Some books of piety give the impression that spiritual communion is a rather com-

plicated exercise, composed of all kinds of preparatory acts and prayers of thanksgiving. Yet there is nothing more simple and natural. Spiritual communion is the desire to unite ourselves to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in order to live His life more fully. How often in the course of a day are we not surprised to find ourselves with dispositions quite different from those of our Lord? We are lukewarm, impatient, proud, wanting in charity, or zeal, or strength against temptation! Who desires that we live His life if not He Himself? "He who eats me will live by me." And who will give us Jesus, if not Mary? A rapid glance in her direction suffices; she understands our desires; then, with her we turn toward Him. "Jesus, I am so lukewarm; come, make me more fervent! Jesus, I am so proud; come, give me Thy humility! Anger possesses me; Jesus, meek and humble of heart, come, make my heart like unto Thine!" Thus throughout the day we shall face our difficulties. Mary will unite her voice with ours, and Jesus will transform us into Himself.

As we attempt to live the ideas sketched above, we see the bonds of relationship that unite the two great Catholic devotions, devotion to the Eucharist and devotion to Mary. They differ in their objects, the humanity of Jesus in the sacrament of the altar and the Blessed Virgin Mary, but they are united in the subject because both are in an excellent degree devotions of love, and because their final end is the same, namely, our identification with Jesus, the Son of Mary.

Therefore, these two devotions are found in all religious souls whose piety consists, not in certain practices, but in the solid dispositions of faith, humility, confidence, and love. Souls who are distinguished for their understanding and love of the Eucharist are equally devout to Mary, and vice versa. Many examples of this practical truth could be cited. To mention just one of the most recent. Father Edward Poppe thought so constantly of the Blessed Virgin, spoke of her so often and with such enthusiasm, one would think that Mary alone existed for him and had usurped the place of Jesus. It was the same Father Poppe, however, who was the great Belgian apostle of the Eucharistic Crusade and of the sanctification of priests and seminarians. Always and everywhere, the Mother conducts us to the Son and the Son to the Mother.

Jesu, tibi sit gloria
Qui natus es de Virgine!

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Mary and Devotion to the Sacred Heart

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is devotion to the humanity of Christ considered especially from the viewpoint of love. The Litany of the Sacred Heart reminds us that the Heart of Jesus was “formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary,” hence formed *by* the divine Person who proceeds from the mutual love of the Father and the Son, and formed *in* the human person who is all love.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart comprises two principal acts: consecration and reparation.

Consecration is the total donation of self to Jesus, who is all love. For many Christians this consecration comprises one act, that is, a prayer read by a priest publicly before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar the first Friday of the month. Really, it ought to be not merely an act, but a life. To live our consecration to Jesus means to act in constant dependence upon Him; it means to submit to Him our thoughts, sentiments, desires, and actions. St. Louis Mary de Montfort has clearly shown that “the easiest, surest, shortest, and most perfect way to realize our belonging—in other words, our consecration—to Jesus, is to give ourselves entirely to the Blessed Virgin, that is to say, to live our total consecration to Mary.”

Reparation requires that we offer loving compensation for our personal sins and for the sins of the whole world to Jesus, who is infinitely loving and is so little loved in return. In the act of consecration composed by Pope Pius XI for the feast of the Sacred Heart, the faithful say to our Lord:

To make amends for the violation of the honor due to Thee, we offer Thee that same satisfaction Thou didst offer to the Father on

the Cross, the Sacrifice Thou dost renew from day to day upon the altars of Thy Church. To this we add *the expiatory merits of Thy Virgin Mother*. . . . Accept, we pray Thee, most gracious Jesus, through the intercession of Our Lady of Reparation, our voluntary offering of expiation."

Indeed, who has ever understood the duty of reparation as perfectly as the Mother of Sorrows, Reparatrix with her Son on Calvary for the sins of mankind? And who has ever been able to offer a reparation approaching her own? The soul that lives in intimacy with her naturally becomes a soul of reparation.

The following lines have been taken from the spiritual notes of the Consummata:

With Mary at the Foot of the Cross

Mary is there, and casting a glance upon the children whom Jesus has given her, she cries: "Who will share my sorrow?"

Oh, my cherished mother, my beloved mother, I will. I will associate myself with thee. . . . I will contemplate the unfathomable sorrow of my mother. . . . What an abyss! She is immaculate and crucified. . . . With thee, O mother, and like thee, let me immolate myself. With thee, I offer to the Father the sufferings of my Jesus. . . .

With the priest I offer to the Father the host of the sacrifice, which is my sacrifice, and together with that host so pure, so divine, so adorable, I offer the little host of my soul in order to be a reparatrix with Him.

Stabat Mater . . . Have courage. Her whole being is strained. Two consolations are given her. She knows that suffering is a gift of love to be given back to love. She accepts therefore with confidence and courage. She gives back lovingly to the Father. Finally, this blessed Mother sees John and Magdalen at the foot of the Cross, purity and penance. . . . She also sees, and Jesus sees too, the souls enamored of reparation who, in the future, will immolate themselves with her, with Him.¹

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 55 ff.

Spiritual Work in Union With Mary

CHAPTER THIRTY

Our Principal End and Principal Means: Jesus, Son of Mary

Prayer and devotion to the Holy Eucharist are not the goal of our spiritual life; they are only two of the means that lead us to it. The goal is identification with Jesus Christ. "For those whom he has foreknown," St. Paul teaches, "he has also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren."¹ Without ceasing the Apostle exhorts his disciples to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ,"² to "be imitators of me as I am of Christ,"³ to "have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus."⁴ Speaking of himself, he dares to say: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."⁵ Jesus Himself had said to His disciples: "For I have given you an example that as I have done to you, so you also should do."⁶ And again: "But when perfected, everyone will be like his teacher."⁷

All Christian spirituality gives first place to Christ, else it would no longer be Christian. From the doctrinal point of view this place is almost identical in all systems of spirituality. All confess that "no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him";⁸ also that "without Christ we can do nothing."⁹ From the practical viewpoint the obligations and the means to accomplish them are about the same: we must above all live in the state of grace, fulfill our duties of state, pray, receive the sacraments, make efforts to resist temptation and acquire virtue in order to advance toward perfection.

But in regard to the place given to Christ, the case is not the same. There is a spirituality fairly common, even among souls that

¹Rom. 8:29.

²Rom. 13:14.

³1 Cor. 11:1.

⁴Phil. 2:5.

⁵Gal. 2:20.

⁶Jn. 13:15.

⁷Lk. 6:40.

⁸Lk. 10:22.

⁹Jn. 15:5.

tend to perfection, in which Christ appears only at intervals and without touching the soul deeply. There is another spirituality in which Christ intervenes incessantly, where everything is regarded from His point of view, where everything reduces itself to some aspect of Christ — a spirituality that is properly Christocentric.

In the first attitude, the state of grace consists in having no grave sin on one's conscience. Sin is an act of disobedience which, if grave, makes the soul worthy of hell; if it is slight, it causes a stay in purgatory more or less lengthy. Duty is an obligation more or less strict and more or less difficult, imposed by God or by the Church in the name of God. Among the obligations, there is prayer, particularly assistance at Mass. Mass serves to produce the body and blood of Christ and recalls the Passion. Holy Communion is a rite a little more sacred than the others; it gives graces which help to avoid sin more easily. Priests and religious have other obligations. They have other spiritual exercises and must recite long prayers which expose them to many distractions. Especially is this true of two exercises, mental prayer and particular examen, which would put the patience of religious to the test if interesting dreams did not come to help pass the time away. Without doubt, true Christians, especially consecrated souls, must apply themselves to the acquisition of virtue. They make efforts, with a certain amount of spirit in the beginning, with a certain amount of lukewarmness after a while — lukewarmness which they blame on the poor results attained. Hence there are periods of stopping, of going back, followed by new attempts to advance, as on the occasion of a retreat or some other event that stirs them. But soon there will be stagnation and retrogression again. In every life there are periods of trial: sicknesses, reverses, sufferings caused by the malice of men, etc. But we try, with more or less patience or impatience, to endure them since God so orders, although it is hard to pardon those who make us suffer. Still the most fervent souls continue toward perfection. They are happy to note any progress, dissatisfied if they discover none. Perfection or sanctity consists in the acquisition of all the virtues; this is something very desirable even naturally, and even more so in view of our heavenly reward. But inevitably we must be satisfied with just a certain amount of good will; perfection is really reserved to beings who are quite different from us.

On the other hand, in Christocentric spirituality the state of grace is the life of Christ in the soul. We can truly say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I that live, it is Christ who lives in me." Mortal sin consists now in preferring a created satisfaction to Jesus; it drives Jesus from the soul. It is true, venial sin does not drive Him away, but it is an evil thing because it is voluntary action which saddens Him. Duty, in this context, is a requisite of the love of Jesus: to accomplish one's duty means affording Him pleasure. Prayer is conversation with Jesus, or with the Father, or with our Mother, conversation that tells them our love and asks their help so that we may ever love and serve them better. Holy Mass is Jesus again offering His body and blood for our salvation and our sanctification; it helps us to suffer with Him and for Him. Holy Communion is the most intimate and most loving union with Jesus, who makes us live His life and communicates to us His dispositions toward the Father, the Holy Spirit, and His Blessed Mother, and also toward all men who are our brothers. Mental prayer is another sort of communion, though not sacramental, in which, under the guidance of Mary, we enter into the soul of Jesus to study, love, and admire all of His dispositions, and strive to make them ours. Examen is a pause in our work to see how we have lived the life of Jesus and how we shall live it more perfectly. The acquisition of virtue is now the acquisition of the dispositions of Jesus. If we love Him, why should we not try to assume His ways of thinking, feeling, desiring, acting? It will take effort to reach that point. Still, what we do for an infinitely lovable being does not cost anything, or if it does, we love it all the more for that very reason. Periods of trial occur also in the life of souls intimately united with Jesus — darkness, desolation, uncertainty. These periods, however, do not bring on a retrogression. Far from it, they prepare for greater intimacy with our Lord.

Does a person living this Christocentric spirituality advance continually? He does not ask the question; he is not curious about measuring his progress from week to week or from month to month. He is always concerned with giving Jesus the maximum of joy, and he can always do so even in desolation, even if guilty of some laxity. In all simplicity, with his misery and his confidence, he goes to Jesus through Mary. Holiness for such a person is not a perfection that produces gratification; holiness is complete identification with Jesus;

holiness gives joy to his divine Brother and to his Mother; it gives glory to the most holy Trinity; holiness permits the soul to love Jesus and Mary incomparably more in heaven, and thus gives infinitely more glory to the adorable Trinity.

If we look for the passion which during a lifetime aroused and sustained those saints whose spiritual life it is possible to study, we find that it was not the desire to be perfect, but the yearning to please Jesus, to identify themselves with Him, to immolate themselves with Him and for Him, and to make Him known to all the world. Each one of those saints could say with St. Paul: "For me to live is Christ."¹⁰ It is striking to observe with what ardor St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, still a little girl at home, wrote of Jesus in her letters to friends.

For beginners, for those making progress, and for those already perfect, the most powerful motive for effort is the love of Jesus. At any point on the spiritual way it is true that "the noble love of Jesus impels to great works and animates to desire always what is most perfect . . . it begins and ends a multitude of enterprises in which he who does not love grows discouraged and succumbs."¹¹ Thus spiritual work consists in observing Jesus constantly in order to copy His dispositions and to substitute them for our own, until He can, as it were, pass entirely into us. It is the constant study of Jesus made under the constant guidance of Mary.

Besides this law of psychology on the power of love, there is another reason for the efficacy of the method described above. The contemplation of Jesus is accompanied by a special grace, a quasi-sacramental grace, acting, so to speak, *ex opere operato*.

All the sacraments derive their efficacy from the humanity of Christ, the author of all grace. When Jesus passed among men, they remarked, according to the testimony of St. Luke, that "power went forth from him and healed all."¹² There is also a power that goes forth from Him to cure, not bodies, but souls, when we enter into contact with His person. Confronted with a word or an action of Jesus we are quite differently impressed than with an argument proposed by a mere man, even by a saint. The latter possesses only human virtue, weak and fallible like everything purely human; the former acts upon the soul like the presence of Jesus Himself.

¹⁰ Phil. 1:21.

¹¹ Imitation of Christ, III, 5. ¹² Lk. 6:19.

The contemplation of Our Lord is not only holy, it is sanctifying; just thinking of Him, looking at Him with faith and love, sanctifies us. For certain souls the life of Christ is a subject of meditation among many others. This is not enough. Christ is not one of the means of the spiritual life; He is our whole spiritual life. . . . Souls who keep their eyes constantly fixed upon Christ . . . enter fully into this divine plan. They advance rapidly and surely on the road of perfection and of holiness. . . . If they bring forth much fruit, it is not only because they dwell in Christ by grace and by fidelity to their love, but also because Christ dwells in them. *Qui manet in me et ego in illo, hic fert fructum multum.*¹³

Before Dom Columba Marmion, Monsignor Hedley had written in the same tenor:

It is a gross error to suppose that the greatest progress is attained by efforts to acquire virtues and to uproot vices. Efforts are indeed necessary, but there is a more excellent way, which, of course, does not dispense with effort. This way is a contemplative union of our intelligence, will, and heart with the holy Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this holy Humanity has an astonishing power of transformation, I would almost say a miraculous power. . . . An hour, a half-hour passed with fervor in contemplating His obedience, patience, humility, love of suffering would do more for the transformation of our nature than days of efforts practicing these virtues, if these efforts are not united to the contemplation of our divine Model.¹⁴

On this subject, here is testimony from experience:

I have always had firm faith in supernatural truths; but my conduct was not any better than the average among my companions who were by no means models. I committed the same faults they did, I confessed my sins when the time came for our group confession, but soon after fell again.

Then, on the occasion of a retreat centered on the Eucharist, I understood that to commit sin was not to offend a commandment, but Jesus Himself, and it was because of my sins that He willed to suffer so much. This was a revelation to me and the beginning of a complete change of life. From that moment on I do not recall ever committing a mortal sin or a deliberate venial sin, not even telling a little lie to

¹³ *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, by Dom Marmion, ch. iv.

¹⁴ Msgr. Hedley, O.S.B., *Evêque de Newport, traduction Bruneau P. SS., Lethielleux, 1905, Chap. XII. Le regard sur Notre-Siegneur*, pp. 146-149.

help me out of a predicament. It seems to me psychologically impossible knowingly to perform an act that would offend Jesus, just as I could not conceive of a person offending a friend casually even in a matter of slight importance.

I have to reproach myself with numberless acts of vanity, impatience, bad humor, etc., but at the moment when I gave way to these sallies, I did not see that they were offensive to Jesus, because they were not fully deliberate.

More than twenty years have passed since this change of viewpoint, and I hope that our Lord will keep me determined to the end of my life to suffer anything rather than be guilty of a fully deliberate delicacy in His regard.

But does not the mission of making us live the life of Christ belong to her who has given Christ to us? She became our mother in becoming the Mother of Jesus. Is it not precisely her maternal mission, after having brought us forth in Christ, to continue our education by fashioning our ideas, sentiments, desires, and habits according to our model, Christ? Obviously the Blessed Virgin must exercise a primary influence in the work of our spiritual transformation.

Father Chaminade explains:

It was in the womb of the august Mary that Jesus Christ was conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost; Jesus was born from the virginal bosom of Mary. *Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine.*

Baptism and faith begin the life of Jesus Christ in us, and thus we have been conceived by the Holy Ghost. But we must, like the Saviour, be born of the Virgin Mary.

It was in the virginal bosom of Mary that Jesus Christ willed to be formed to our likeness, and there also we should form ourselves to His likeness. There we should fashion our habits upon His, our inclinations upon His inclinations, our life upon His life.

Whatever Mary bears in her bosom can only be Jesus Christ or can live only the life of Jesus Christ. With her inconceivable love Mary always bears us, as little children, in her chaste bosom, until having formed in us the first traits of her Son, she brings us forth like Him. Mary does not cease repeating to us the beautiful words of St. Paul: "*Filioli, quos iterum parturio donec formetur Christus in vobis*; my dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you."¹⁵

¹⁵ S. F. I, par. 112. Gal. 4:19.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Christocentric and Marian Mental Prayer

There are many methods of mental prayer. Almost all of them speak of union with our Lord and a certain number make mention of the Blessed Virgin. In this chapter I do not pretend to offer a new method. I wish to show only how intimate union with Mary in mental prayer facilitates union with Jesus and facilitates mental prayer in general.

The purpose of our spiritual work is identification with Christ. The problem is, therefore, to study Christ in order to make ourselves like him. Mental prayer is the most efficacious means to learn how to think, to feel, to desire, and to act like Christ, to identify ourselves with Him. The more Christocentric our mental prayer, the more easily we attain this end. "A meditation well made," Father Chaminade taught his disciples, "is a veritable communion, a veritable union with Jesus Christ, although not sacramental."¹

But to realize this true union with Jesus Christ, meditation must not simply be an intellectual, theological, or exegetical study, nor a short sermon preached to oneself, nor a composition in style, nor a soliloquy of the soul. As much as possible, meditation must be a dialogue with Jesus Christ, or better, a conversation among three, the soul, Jesus, and Mary. Often there will be more than three: the Father, the Holy Spirit, St. Joseph, and others will be present.

Mary makes Jesus known to us. "Since it has pleased eternal Providence to give us the Man-God through the Blessed Virgin, and since she, made fruitful by the power of the Holy Ghost, bore the Man-God in reality in her bosom, what is more natural than for us to receive Jesus Christ from the hands of Mary? . . . No one in the world knew Jesus as she did; no one is a better teacher and a better guide for making Jesus known. It follows also that no one is equal to

¹S. F. I, par. 321.

her in uniting men to Jesus.”² These are the words of St. Pius X, spoken from experience.

Let us cite two other men who spoke from experience, Father Chaminade and Brother Leonard. “If no one,” says the former, “knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son has revealed Him, similarly no one knows the Son as well as the Mother, and the Church to whom she has revealed Him. Let us unite ourselves therefore to Mary in mental prayer and beg her to make her Son known to us.”³ “To know the Son,” adds Brother Leonard, “address yourselves to the Mother. Light on Jesus comes from purity, love, study, and generosity. But who possesses these more than Mary? Jesus kept nothing from her. To have the light of faith shine upon me in abundance and warmth, I will work close to Mary.”⁴

St. Luke, the evangelist of the Blessed Virgin, who, indirectly or directly, received information from her about the first years of the Saviour's life, twice makes the remark: Mary preserved all these things in her heart and pondered on all she saw or learned about her Son.⁵ Certainly that was her occupation all through life. For thirty years, she saw Him and conversed with Him. During His public life, news that was sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes pessimistic, came to Nazareth. She assisted at His Passion and saw Him after the resurrection. Then, in intimacy with John, one of the first two Apostles, Christ's preferred disciple and confidant, the one who could penetrate further into the heart of the Master than any other apostle, she would hear from his lips all that he had seen and heard regarding her Son. John would relate what he had seen and heard, and, she, by her questions and reflections, would make him understand better the meaning of all he had learned.

Thus, all the meditations we can make about Jesus were made already by Mary long ago. Let us make them with her now and she will help us understand, feel, and desire a little of what she understood, felt, and desired. We shall regard Jesus through her eyes and love Him with her heart.

If we are in the purgative way and wish to meditate on the great

² Encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904.

³ S. F. I, par. 333. Elsewhere he says (I, 132): “That is a sad meditation in which the Blessed Virgin does not enter.”

⁴ *Vie*, 333, 338.

⁵ Lk. 2:19, 51.

truths or on sin, we shall find in the Gospel many words of Jesus that will enlighten us on these subjects. Is it not the mission of Jesus to save us from hell and to lead us to heaven? If we are in the illuminative way and wish to apply ourselves to such or such a virtue, we shall find it taught and practiced to perfection in the life of Christ. If we have arrived at the unitive way, how could we unite ourselves better to Jesus than by contemplating Him directly? How could we unite ourselves better to the Father than by contemplating the constant preoccupation of Jesus to glorify Him and to do His holy will?

Theoretically, we believe all that the Church teaches. But do we practice what we believe? The problem is to transform theoretical into practical faith. It is the purpose of mental prayer to teach us how to do this. Hence, we must exercise our faith on the truth we wish to transfuse into our lives. We need, for instance, the spirit of abnegation. Jesus, what did You think of it? "If anyone wishes to be my disciple, let him renounce himself. . . . If thy hand or thy eye scandalize thee, cut it off, tear it out. . . ." How did You practice it, O Jesus? "I led a life of renouncement from the first moment until the last, especially during my passion. . . ." I believe, O Jesus, in the necessity of renunciation because You cannot deceive nor be deceived. I believe it, although men about me live as though renouncement is a great folly. So much the worse for them! You have the words of life. I believe You, though my nature protests against this truth. Too bad for my nature; it has been conceived in sin. I believe, but increase my faith!

O Mary, proclaimed blessed for having believed, help me to believe as you did!

Jesus foretold that we would not understand His teachings, but promised His Spirit to make us understand all truth. O Holy Spirit, come to make me understand this teaching of Jesus; it is so hard for human nature. Spirit of love, give me light to see and strength to practice!

We repeat these acts of faith slowly, giving our full adherence, not by way of autosuggestion, but in order to make the truth sink deeply into our soul. We must multiply supplications, because to believe practically, we need grace, victorious grace.

It will not be sufficient to make acts of faith with the mind and

the will only. Father Chaminade insists on "the faith of the heart." For we must love the truth.

How can we arrive at loving it, especially when there is question of an austere truth? By considering it in Jesus. Jesus loved renouncement. Why? Because of the Father. By renouncing Himself, He did the Father's will, He showed that He loved Him. He made reparation to the Father for the outrages of men. He loved the Father for having given Him Mary as Mother; His renouncement, His Passion, merited for her the divine maternity with all her other privileges. He loved the Father because He would make me another child of Mary, His other self. He loved the Father, because He would accept the redemption of all men by His renouncement, because He made us children of the Eternal Father and of His Virgin Mother.

With Mary, we contemplate this love which Jesus had for self-renunciation all His life, especially during His Passion. We admire, we love, we thank, we resolve to share in His renouncement for love of Him.

It is not only a sentiment of gratitude to Jesus and Mary that will impel us to embrace a life of renunciation. In the presence of persons highly esteemed and intensely loved, a kind of psychological sympathy or contagion makes their manner of thought and sentiment become ours; their soul, so to say, passes into us. Similarly in this loving contemplation of Jesus and Mary a transfusion of thought, sentiment, and inclinations takes place from their interior to our own; their soul becomes, so to speak, our soul.

In the case of Jesus and Mary this transfusion of thought and sentiment is not the simple act of a psychological law. Jesus lives in us. Mary works in us by her mediation of grace. Therefore a supernatural influence is added to the natural influence of human psychology. Hence the more we beg Jesus and Mary, the more perfectly will they pass on their dispositions to us; the truer it will be that it is no longer we who live, but Jesus and Mary who live in us.

We cannot insist enough on the importance of supplications in meditation. If they are real cries from the heart, they are even more important, in a sense, than thoughts and contemplation. On the natural level, thought and contemplation leave us at our own place in the presence of Jesus and Mary. Supplications cast us at their feet

or upon their hearts. Supernaturally, moreover, supplications are a direct means to obtain grace.

Furthermore, they are always possible, which is a great consolation for beginners or for souls in desolation. No matter how arid the soul, it can always beg for light, for love, for strength; it can lay bare its distress, its nothingness, its confidence, its abandonment, and that indefinitely, just as the Canaanite woman pursued our Lord with her prayers in favor of her daughter. And let us not forget that often the best supplication is the mere repetition of the name of Jesus or the name of Mary.

The fact that we unite with Mary in contemplating Jesus has a double advantage. First we penetrate further into the Heart of Jesus than if we alone attempted to explore it. In order to enter into this holy of holies and to understand infinite love, we must be loving, and we are more loving when we feel the hand of our Mother guiding us. She knows her Jesus intimately and leads us ever forward into the mysteries of His love.

At times if we were alone we would go astray. Jesus is God at the same time that He is man, and face to face with some action of His we might say: "We are not God, we cannot imitate Him." But Mary, a pure creature, who has reproduced all the dispositions of Jesus as perfectly as they can be reproduced by a creature, shows us how we also can reproduce the divine model. Jesus is like a masterpiece written in a language that we know only imperfectly; Mary is the faithful translation, written in our mother tongue. Through her we understand Him much better.

From time to time, absorbed in contemplating Jesus and Mary, we may cast a glance upon ourselves and our attempts to reproduce their dispositions. How different from Jesus and Mary we are! But they will give us strength to imitate them. With Mary we take note of the obstacles to surmount and the means to take gradually to approach the divine model. She will fashion us, who "consult" her, after the image of her first-born Son.

Meditation should end with a resolution. If the resolution bears directly upon the object of our spiritual work — of which there is question in a following chapter — it should follow the indications given in that chapter. If the resolution bears upon a matter not directly related to our spiritual work, it is futile to take one *résolu-*

tion relative to the meditation and another relative to our spiritual work; we risk keeping neither. Meditation made in loving union with Jesus and Mary will supply our will with a new motive for showing them our love by more marked efforts in our spiritual work.

Just as we begin a meditation with Mary, so we should end it with her. Father Chaminade recommends "putting into the hands of Mary all the fruit derived from the meditation, begging her to help us make holy use of it. This act should be performed with all the trust which good children have in the best of mothers. *Ipsa enim detinet virtutes ne fugiant, merita ne pereant, gratias ne effluant* (St. Bonaventure). Mary sustains virtues, lest they weaken; preserves merits, lest they be lost; cares for graces lest they be squandered."¹

For clearness' sake the preceding ideas had to be exposed methodically. In practice it is not necessary to hold to this order. We may depend on the inspirations of grace, keeping the liberty of children of God, and of Mary. If we do not know how to carry on let us simply ask our Mother's help.

Should we not sometimes make meditations that are entirely Marian, for example, on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin?

Undoubtedly this will happen in the beginning when we are more preoccupied with the consolation we expect from Mary than with the consolation we wish to give her. However, if we wish to understand the Mother well, we must contemplate her in the light of her Son. "Mary has meaning only in relation to Jesus." The mysteries of Mary — her Immaculate Conception, her Virginity, her Divine Maternity, and all the others — derive their purpose and meaning from the relations of Mary with Jesus. The virtues of Mary are only the reproduction of the virtues of Jesus. The role of Mary in our regard, her universal mediation, her spiritual maternity, her apostolic mission in the Church, are but the consequence and extension of her mission as Mother of Jesus and co-operatrix in His works. Just as Mary helps us understand her Son better, so Jesus helps us understand His Mother better. And just as we contemplate Jesus through the eyes of Mary and love Him with the heart of Mary, so also we contemplate Mary through the eyes of Jesus and we love her with His Sacred Heart. Have we not become other Christs in Mary's eyes? Hence we shall undoubtedly experience the same feeling which caused

¹ 6 S.F., I, par. 331.

a Marian soul to remark on the feast of the Immaculate Conception: "I never feel more love for Jesus than when I have meditated on Mary."

Beginners will no doubt find difficulty in keeping engaged for a long time on one word or one act of our Lord or of His Blessed Mother. It will be better not to delay on just one incident of their lives until it is profitable to do so. Let them pass immediately to another word or another action.

Besides, if they multiply acts of faith as we have explained above, if they repeat the names of Jesus and Mary, if with Mary they try to see how they can cause pleasure to Jesus and to her, it will be fairly easy for them to pause a while at each thought. As their intimacy with Christ and with Mary becomes closer they will find more satisfaction in contemplating, admiring, loving, and imitating them, and gradually the meditations will become truly "a Communion with Jesus." The Gospel soon becomes their preferred book of meditation; it steeps them in thinking and living with our Lord. Their own experience will show them more and more clearly how "power goes forth from him and heals,"⁷ and makes them live His own life.

For mental prayer to realize such results, it must be prepared. Usually a meditation poorly prepared is a meditation badly made.

Three kinds of preparation are ordinarily distinguished: habitual, proximate, and immediate.

Habitual preparation consists in a life of recollection and union with our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. The counsels given in the chapters on union with Mary in our various actions and prayers, if faithfully followed, will assure this preparation.

Proximate preparation comprises the choice of a subject with some dominant ideas. If one has not prepared what to say to Jesus and Mary, how is it possible not to be lost in distractions at the time of the interview?

The subject chosen must be precise and suited to our needs. We must plan our subject with Mary in line with our spiritual work and the coming day, or in view of the previous day's troubles, temptations, special difficulties, faults, etc. Often it is useful to note on paper the ideas on which we propose to meditate. The pen is an instrument of precision for the mind and the memory. We should ask Mary if what

⁷ Lk. 6:19.

we have prepared is really going to interest us during the meditation, and we should not be satisfied until she is satisfied.

Immediate preparation consists above all in making an act of faith in the presence of those to whom we wish to speak, especially in the presence of Jesus and Mary. But this faith must be a loving faith. The better we realize that Jesus, Mary, the Father, the Holy Spirit, etc., are there as truly as if we saw them, that they see us, hear us, love us, that they are desirous of busying themselves with us and of making us live more and more the Christ-life, the easier it will be for us to enter into a loving, living, and lively conversation with them. If we feel like prolonging the thought of their presence, we should yield to that attraction as long as it persists; nothing does more good than to keep ourselves lovingly in that presence.

Distractions occur during meditation as during other spiritual exercises. Since they spring from the natural weakness of our mind, they are inevitable. We may say, however, that half of our distractions could be avoided, for they result from lack of preparation, especially lack of proximate preparation.

Whether the causes be involuntary or even voluntary, as soon as they are noticed we should go to Jesus with "our Mother, our misery, and our confidence." With Mary, we shall see how, despite the lack of preparation, by acts of humility, faith, confidence, and love, we can cause pleasure to Jesus.

At times we have no taste for mental prayer. The cause of this may be physical — fatigue, sleepiness, sickness, or only some indisposition. At other times the cause may be moral — lack of preparation, some fault, or more often an attachment of the will to some passion, recognized or camouflaged. Sometimes the trial is willed by God to purify the soul or to lead it to offer itself as a victim, just as Jesus did in Gethsemani.

Here again, no matter what the origin of that condition, we should begin by going to Mary, and then with Mary, with our misery and our confidence, we should go to Jesus. In any case Mary will make us understand how to please Him, and if He demands a sacrifice, she will obtain for us the strength to say, "Thy will, not mine, be done!"

We notice that if union with Mary favors meditation, meditation in its turn fosters union with Mary: nowhere else do we learn better how to know, admire, love, and imitate the Blessed Virgin, how to

enter into intimacy with her, how to organize our spiritual work with her in order to Marianize all our thoughts, sentiments, resolutions, actions—our whole life. Whoever wishes to become truly Marian must become a lover of meditation; and whoever wishes to become a meditative soul must become Marian.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Union With Mary During Spiritual Reading and Conferences

Spiritual reading has always held an important place in Christian ascetical tradition. Mental prayer cannot replace it. The purpose of mental prayer is not precisely to produce new ideas but to transform into practical and living principles the more or less speculative thoughts we have been reading. Spiritual reading is the natural nourishment of mental prayer. He who neglects spiritual reading risks making wearisome and distracted meditations and seeing his spiritual equipment diminish bit by bit.

Through spiritual reading Jesus continues His preaching in Galilee and Judea, teaching us to think His thoughts, to live His life. Wherever Jesus acts, Mary is associated with Him. He gives us the lessons, Mary explains them. Before beginning to read we would do well to orientate ourselves in this supernatural setting by making an act of faith in the presence of Jesus who is about to speak to us and of Mary who will help us understand.

We should not read through vain curiosity, with undue haste, in boredom and distraction, in a critical spirit, but with respectful attention to Jesus, like Mary listening to what she heard from or about her Son, pondering it all in her heart. As we read, the ideas exposed stimulate all kinds of reflections and impressions; we should pass them on to Mary, just as during an interesting reading we share our reflections with an interested friend at our side. This renders reading alive, active, and more profitable, for Mary points out the practical conclusions of the text. Sometimes we spontaneously request that she help us live the lesson that Jesus is teaching.

One day Matt Talbot, the holy dockhand of Ireland, was asked how a man as illiterate as he could understand the meaning of what

he read. He replied: "Before reading a book I always ask the Blessed Virgin for the grace of understanding what I read."¹

At every mention of God or of our Lord in their reading, some interior souls, instead of thinking of Him in the third person, address Him in the second person. Thus they are in the presence, not of a God, nor of a Christ abstract and distant, but of Him who dwells in them, whom they have received or will receive in the sacred Host. Their reading thus becomes more loving and living. With Mary, it is easy to remain near Jesus.

Of course from time to time Marian souls choose a book on the Blessed Virgin for their spiritual reading. Not a year passes without expanding and deepening their knowledge of their heavenly Mother.

The method suggested for spiritual reading applies almost identically to assistance at an instruction or even at a course of theology. We must insist particularly on the act of faith in the presence of Jesus and Mary, for in the presence of a preacher or professor, much more than in the presence of a book, we are tempted to think of the man whom we see rather than of Jesus who speaks by His mouth. Mary will facilitate that act of faith: she will turn aside distractions and will suggest practical resolutions.

¹ *Revue des Prêtres de Marie, Reine des Coeurs*, June, 1937, p. 179.

Union With Mary and the Practice of the Virtues

For union with Mary in the acquisition of moral virtues, the directions given in the previous chapters and in Book Three of *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary* suffice.

On the subject of theological virtues, however, supplementary treatment seems appropriate. The first two, faith and hope, cannot be studied in Jesus. In the Son of God made man, there was no faith — He saw; there was no hope — He possessed. Of those two virtues Mary is the supreme model.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Union With Mary and the Practice of Faith

Faith is the primary condition of all supernatural life. In every period of history, faith is, according to the Council of Trent, “the beginning, the foundation, and the root of all justification.”

A solid spirit of faith is needed especially at times when faith is obscure, weakened, unknown, combated, in epochs when crises of faith and apostasies multiply.

Now, union with Mary is a powerful support of our faith.

Let us observe, first of all, a fact of experience: devotion to Mary, especially a life of union with Mary, is the barometer of the Christian's spirit of faith. A Christianity more or less rationalistic does not appreciate this devotion. On the contrary, conversion to the Catholic religion or to a life fundamentally Christian is marked by a fervent love for the Blessed Virgin. Most of the great converts in recent years give eloquent testimony to this fact.

Indeed there are close connections both in the psychological and in the theological orders between union with Mary and faith.

The functions and grandeurs of Mary have no meaning unless

they are considered from principles of faith. Men without faith may admire and in fact do admire Christ; He is a leader, a model, a reformer, a philosopher, a moralist, a sociologist, a friend of the poor and the unfortunate. He is a hero, the martyr to a big idea, the man who has had by far the most profound, the most immense, the most durable, the most beneficent influence upon humanity. Mary is nothing if viewed only in a natural light: a poor woman, from a despised town, saying almost nothing, doing almost nothing. She remained far from her Son's theater of action, witnessed only His punishment, then disappeared from this world, we do not know how or when or where.

But a person with faith readily becomes enamored of this humble woman. Faith upsets all human values; it glorifies renouncement, poverty, suffering, self-forgetfulness, self-sacrifice — virtues which characterize the whole existence of Mary. By her heroic faith, this Woman surpasses in grandeur and influence all beings on earth and in heaven, God alone excepted.

Union with Mary makes the soul loving, because Mary, the sweet Virgin, the mother of Jesus and our mother, is all love. This union creates an affinity between the soul and the mysteries of faith, which are mysteries of love. To believe means to believe in love. Often the loss of faith begins with the loss of the sense of love.

Union with Mary inspires us with sentiments of humility by making us little children of the humble handmaid of the Lord. And humility is essential to believing, for believing means relying, not on our own wisdom, but on truths which surpass our understanding.

Even for the faithful who do not have time for prolonged spiritual exercises, devotion to Mary is a powerful means to a life of faith. Every prayer addressed to the heavenly Mother recalls the supernatural world which hovers over them and where some day they will live. The recitation of the rosary above all, with the meditation upon the mysteries or even the simple mention of them, maintains true Catholics in a thoroughly supernatural atmosphere. The joyful mysteries recall the Son of God come upon earth through Mary in order to redeem them. The sorrowful mysteries present to their eyes the sufferings of Christ and the necessity of suffering for Him and like Him. The glorious mysteries open to them that true life to which they are all called and where Jesus and Mary await them. For them God and the next life are realities. Suffering, instead of disconcerting

them, as so easily happens to others, finds them resigned to the loving will of the Father who is in heaven; and before the interests of this life, without hesitating, they place those of the next, ready to sacrifice the former in order not to lose the latter. They recite their Hail Marys perhaps with many distractions, but the daily thought of the great mysteries of religion makes them think, act, and suffer like Christians.

It is easy to understand how union with Mary intensifies the faith of those who constantly try to live in union with her. It has them look at everything, supernatural as well as natural, from her viewpoint, which is evidently the viewpoint of faith, faith of the heart.

Above all, mental prayer made in union with Mary contributes powerfully to the intensification of their spirit of faith by showing them every virtue as practiced and loved by Jesus and Mary.

The contemplation of the faith of Mary and the imitation of it will lift our own faith to a heroic degree. From one end to the other, her life was a life of faith. In the midst of obscurity and of almost constant contradictions, she had to believe. She had to believe that she would be the Mother of the Messias. What was incomparably more difficult to accept, she would become His Mother while remaining a virgin. What, however, made the mystery absolutely disconcerting was that her child would be the very Son of God.

She had to believe contradictory things: for instance, that her Son should sit on the throne of David when, in the very city of David, they refused to receive Him; that He should flee during the night from the usurper of His throne; that He would pass thirty years of His life in obscurity; that hardly would He show Himself in public, than the priests, Pharisees, and scribes, the most venerable and the most powerful influences in the nation, would league against Him to destroy Him. She had to believe that He would reign forever even when she saw Him die on a cross of ignominy. She had to believe that He would attract all to Him, even though His followers, formerly so enthusiastic, fled from Him, and His very Apostles lost confidence and abandoned Him.

But Mary preserved an unshaken faith. It was not in vain that the Holy Spirit proclaimed her blessed for having believed, because the predictions made to her were accomplished.¹

¹ For an analysis of the faith of Mary, see *Mary in Doctrine*, p. 204 *if*.

In moments when our faith is particularly dim, when perhaps men in whom we had full confidence cease to believe in Christ, when the Church seems defeated and her enemies triumphant, when we ourselves are passing through personal crises, it will be sufficient to contemplate our Mother and to beg her for her faith in God's word and for faith in the final victory of Him who said, Have confidence, I have overcome the world."²

2Jn. 16:33.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Union With Mary and the Virtue of Hope

Hope is the theological virtue by which, relying on God's goodness and His fidelity to His promises, we expect with unwavering certitude eternal life and the means to attain it.

As of faith, so of hope, Mary is our great model.¹ Most certainly she would expect from God, her Father, her Son, and her Spouse, eternal union with them. The contrary is unthinkable.

But to be worthy of that exalted vocation she had to respond to it fully. History records the stories of saints who, when called to the episcopacy or to the sovereign pontificate, hid themselves as unworthy and incapable of such dignity and responsibility. Greater dignity and responsibility were proposed by God to Mary. Upon her acceptance depended the accomplishment of the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption, the greater glory of God and the eternal destiny of numberless souls. For herself it would be an elevation, but also a responsibility fraught with unspeakable trials. Yet, without emotion she says simply: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word." Considering God above all, and considering herself only in God, she sees clearly that if the Most High gives her such a vocation He will give her everything necessary to fulfill it according to His views. She knows well that of herself she is nothing. But that conviction gives her confidence, for like St. Paul, she understands that God chooses those who are nothing so that no flesh may glorify itself.² He has regarded the nothingness of His handmaid; He has done such wonderful things in her; that is why all generations will call her blessed.

The soul united with its mother Mary shares her sentiments. It is

¹ See *Mary in Doctrine*, pp. 334–336.

² 1 Cor. 1:29.

confident of salvation, not because it strives to live in the state of grace, but because it knows that God will not permit a child of Mary to perish. How could Jesus abandon the soul which for years helped Him love His Mother and helped others love her? Thousands of times it had repeated, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death!" At the moment of death, could its mother abandon it to the power of Satan? Is it not almost a truth of faith in the Catholic Church that no one has ever heard it said that anyone who invoked Mary's protection or implored her help was left unaided?

A Catholic knows from experience that his mother refuses nothing necessary for a happy eternity and that, according to the teaching of the saints, devotion to Mary is the shortest, the surest, the easiest, and the most perfect path for arriving at union with God. Is not Mary the Distributrix of all graces, and to whom will she grant heavenly favors more readily than to those who have given themselves totally to her and who endeavor ceaselessly to carry out her least desire? *In te Domina speravi; non confundar in aeternum* — In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; I know I shall never be disappointed.

Union With Mary and the Virtue of Charity

The theological virtue of charity consists in loving God above all things because of Himself, and in loving one's neighbor as oneself for love of God.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Union With Mary and the Love of God

JESUS teaches us that love of God means to do His will. "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."¹ And again: "If you love me keep my commandments. . . . If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him."²*

To do God's will means to avoid all that He forbids, that is, every kind of sin, and to fulfill all His positive orders, whether given by Himself or by His representatives.

We have seen above how union with Mary facilitates the flight from sin. Submission to everything that God wills comes easy to every soul living close to Mary. At first this intimacy supposes union with Mary's will, and that means union with God's will. Besides, Mary leads us naturally to imitate all her dispositions. And her fundamental disposition, that which strikes us in the first manifestation of her soul to the angel Gabriel, is a simple, complete conformity with the holy will of God no matter how strange its expression. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." How many times she had to repeat that humble consent during her life, particularly on Calvary! Like his mother, the child of Mary will say "Yes" to the least wish of God. No more than his mother will

*Mt. 7:21.

² Jn. 4:15 and 23.

he make a distinction between strict orders of God and His simple wishes: "He expects it of me, so I shall do it."

In the soul's union with Mary, love of God becomes continually more intense. Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our mother, is pure love. You cannot live steadily near her without also gradually becoming pure love. From another point of view, love of God is a grace, the greatest of graces. Will not the Distributrix of all graces be exceptionally profuse with the grace of love in favor of the soul who lives constantly in her sight, desirous of doing all that she wishes?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Union With Mary and Devotion to the Most Holy Trinity

Every Catholic renders homage to the most Holy Trinity, at least in his mind. He believes that in God there are three Persons, distinct but not separate, who constitute but one God, and that these three Persons are equal in duration, power, intelligence, and love.

To this cult of the mind, the Catholic sometimes adds a cult of the will. He makes the sign of the cross while invoking the three divine Persons; sometimes he recites the "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," or the Creed which mentions the works attributed to each of the three Persons. With the whole Church he honors this mystery on Trinity Sunday.

Besides the *cult* rendered to God and to His saints, there is also *devotion* to them. Cult gives what is obligatory; devotion adds the supererogatory. Cult stems from the virtue of justice and is an affair of the will; devotion proceeds from love, supposes attraction, spontaneity, generosity, joy, sometimes even enthusiasm.

Fervent Christians profess not only a cult, but a devotion to the most Holy Trinity.

Above all, they show devotion to the Son of God incarnate, to His different mysteries, His coming among us, His Passion, the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart.

They love also to pray to the Father, according to the very recommendation of the Son: "Thus shall you pray: Our Father who art in heaven. . . . They recall the goodness of the Father who knows their needs even before they ask for help, who takes more care of them than the best of earthly fathers cares for his children.¹

They also invoke the Holy Spirit, with more frequency perhaps

¹ Mt. 6 and 7.

than devotion, by the recitation of the "Come, Holy Ghost," before instructions or courses in school, or by the more solemn *Vent Creator Spiritus* in extraordinary circumstances when they feel more need of His light.

There are Christians who, with conviction and feeling, cultivate a devotion to each of the three divine Persons. For the majority of Christians, however, the devotion to the first and the third Persons is generally reduced to a minimum. This is true of the Holy Spirit, the Great Misunderstood because the Great Unknown, the one who most attracted the attention of the faithful in the first period of Christianity, when He distributed His astonishing charismata.

Furthermore, the three Persons are honored almost as if they were separate. No one admits this, of course; for were he questioned, he would confess that they are not separate at all. But in practice he addresses them without even insinuating the intimate and necessary relations that unite them.

As in our other activities, union with Mary might be said to introduce new life into our trinitarian devotion. As already explained, such devotion consists not in reasoning, but in entering into the interior of Mary and, with her, into the interior of Jesus to make their thoughts, sentiments, desires, and activities our own.

Certainly it is not necessary to show any further how union with Mary helps us attain intimacy with Jesus. The preceding chapters suffice. There is a word to be said, however, about souls animated, it would seem, with a great devotion to our Lord without great devotion to Mary. We do not speak here of Protestants who, through a scruple of conscience, have rejected recourse to the Mother of Jesus. Nor do we speak of the Christians of the first centuries when devotion to Mary was not as explicit as at present because the knowledge of Mary's role was not as clear as it is today. We are speaking of Catholics of our time, of certain laymen, priests, religious men and women.

Often they are souls, naturally quite noble but more or less rationalistic, for whom Christ is a Leader who invites them to follow Him, a Model who poses before them, rather than a Life which makes them live. They do not understand well the spirit of humility, still less the spirit of evangelical childhood. Certain women religious have a fairly intense love for our Lord, their divine Spouse, but they think more of being loved by this Spouse than of loving Him, more

of receiving than of giving. If they really wanted to love Him with their whole heart, they would feel both their powerlessness to do so and the need they have of that Mother who would unite her love to theirs. Sometimes the attitude in question springs from prejudice or from a Jansenistic education.

Here are two appropriate testimonials. The first is furnished by Msgr. d'Hulst, writing to one of his spiritual clients under date of May 26, 1880:

I have promised to help you discover Mary and to tell you what she must be especially for you, my child. It is clear that God wants you for Himself. The essence of your religion is love; the chief obstacle, mistrust. The obstacle will disappear, the essence will develop when the filial spirit masters your soul; and the filial spirit will cause you to enter the family of God such as God made it, that is, with Mary as mother. You cannot change the fact that Jesus was given by Mary, and all good things together with Him. You cannot change the fact that the Holy Spirit inspires souls with sentiments like His for the Blessed Mother. All this is true for everybody. But by the very fact that you have a virtue of religion that is more laborious, more contradicted, more interiorly tried, more exteriorly disturbed by the storms of temptation and doubt, you have a more particular need of this sweet remedy which softens, simplifies, dilates, restores, and introduces the soul to generosity through confidence.

That is the secret, my dear child; it is not very mysterious, but it is efficacious. Try it, and instead of being jealous for the moments seemingly taken from Jesus and given to Mary, take Mary for patroness, not in the sense of that exterior devotion which satisfies common souls, but as patroness of your interior life. Have recourse to her on every occasion; give her half of all your prayers, of all the events that occur in your interior kingdom, your joys, pains, temptations, desires. Ask that she herself lead you to her Son, to be sure you are not deceived and not wearied in seeking Him.

His spiritual daughter obeyed with docility and was rewarded, as we learn from the letter of her director, dated June 10 of the following year:

What happiness you cause me by telling of the discovery which you have just made, finally — the discovery of Mary! More peace in suffering, more sweetness in austerity, more confidence in trial, more generosity in love — such are the fruits proper to intimacy with her.

Do not terminate the octave of Pentecost without asking, *through her*, for devotion to the Holy Spirit, that is, devotion to the interior life, to the principle of love hidden in our hearts which inspires prayer and sacrifice.

This soul continued her efforts and her discoveries. On May 3, 1886, Msgr. d'Hulst was able to write to her:

How right you are about the Blessed Virgin! . . . Indeed, there is a perfection in the Christian life which is not reached except by devotion to Mary and according to the measure of that devotion, be it in prayer, in penance, in hope, or in love. A person advances that much further as she has more abundantly the spirit of the Son. Now, the spirit of the Son does not only cry in our hearts: Father, Father . . . it also cries: Mother, Mother. The day on which we have understood the facility, the advantage, the assurance, the economy of time, of effort, and of suffering which full openness of heart with the "Mother of fair love" procures for us, we shall make a decisive step forward on the path which leads to God and we shall place ourselves in safety.

Here is the more recent testimony of a cloistered religious, pious, but without any special devotion to Mary. Her brother, a priest, recommended that she consecrate herself to Mary. "Oh," she replied, "I understand the Blessed Virgin well and I love her, but I feel attracted toward the Sacred Heart." She consented however to make her consecration to Mary. Since then, every time she meets her brother she speaks to him of Mary. "My life is entirely transformed ever since I belong entirely to Mary."

What was the attitude of Mary toward God the Father? Very early, probably from her Immaculate Conception,² by means of infused light she must have known God as her Creator and Father; she saw that she was filled by Him with unique graces that were always increasing; she felt with what infinite love He loved her, a creature who was nothing by herself. Hence, sentiments of veneration, of thanksgiving, of filial love, of abandonment filled her heart. Hence also, the total and irrevocable gift of her entire self to the good pleasure of this infinitely loving Father.

Contact with people around her showed her how she was better

² This opinion is professed by a considerable number of saints and theologians: St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori; Terrien, Hugon, Suavé, Garrigou-Lagrange. The reasons favoring this opinion are given in *Mary in Doctrine*, by E. Neubert, p. 162 ff.

preserved from sin, how much more she was favored than all of them, without any merit on her part. Hence an increase in gratitude and filial love; hence also sentiments of reparation for the sins which she saw His other children commit against Him.

And as she daily received more graces and corresponded with them in ever increasing fervor, her filial piety toward the Father increased incessantly.

Then one day an angel told her that the Father willed His own Son to be her son also. She would thus be His associate in the generation of the same Son of God, though under another aspect. What infinite condescension in that inconceivable love of the Father for His lowly daughter! Henceforth what will be her filial love, her gratitude, her humility, her devotedness toward this Father!

Jesus is born. Soon, and how often and with what accents, will He speak of His Father in the little house of Nazareth! What love, what respect, what filial devotedness for this Father! One day, in the temple, He will recall to His parents that He must be entirely about His Father's business, though it will pain them to hear it.

Later, to His disciples, He will speak of this same Father who sent Him to redeem the world at the price of His blood. He honors His Father; His nourishment is to do the will of that Father, and although the chalice that is presented to Him inspires with human repugnance, He prays repeatedly: "Father, not My will but Thine be done." His last word on the cross will be an act of confidence in His Father: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Of these words pronounced after His departure from Nazareth, Mary hears some directly; others are reported to her by the disciples, especially by John. She passes her life meditating on them in her heart. The contemplation of the filial dispositions of the Son for His Father enlivens and perfects even more her own dispositions toward Him whose first action as her Father was the Immaculate Conception.

Alongside our mother, we contemplate, we admire, we love, we make our own the filial dispositions of her who was the privileged daughter and the associate of the Father. And with her we penetrate into the heart of her Son in order to contemplate, admire, and love the filial dispositions of Christ. We pray that they be transfused into us, so that with the heart of the mother and the heart of the

Son, we may love, thank, and adore in spirit and in truth that same infinitely beloved Father.

In an analogous way Mary makes her dispositions toward the Divine Spirit pass over into us. The Holy Spirit came upon her in her Immaculate Conception to keep her entirely pure and to lavish His graces upon her. He came upon her a second time to make her Mother of God. For a third time He descended upon her and the Apostles in the Cenacle in order to inaugurate the Church and to transform into saints the disciples who were going henceforth to continue the work begun by her Son and to whom she was to serve as mother and counselor. It was this Spirit whom the Son was sending from the Father, the Spirit, substantial love of the Father and the Son, who would make known to the disciples what they had been incapable of grasping until then; He would make them understand the whole truth; He would be their counselor and their support until the end of time.

And so, along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit was the constant object of the thought and the love of the Blessed Virgin. He it was who enlightened her, strengthened her, prayed in her, and made her say: Father, Father! What must have been the veneration, the love, the thanksgiving, the docility of the Blessed Virgin to the Divine Spirit!

Living in constant intimacy with Mary, making our own all her thoughts and affections, begging her to pass into our hearts the dispositions of her heart toward the Divine Spirit, we, children of Mary, will learn to live in intimacy with the "sweet host of our soul," and to realize more and more that, like the Spirit, both the Father and Son and the Mother also, are all love. Just as we go to Jesus through Mary, so must we go to the Holy Spirit through her. It is He who must form Jesus in us. He began by forming Jesus in Mary and with her; in the same way He must form Jesus in us; and then, with her, the Holy Spirit must make Him live more and more in us. "As Jesus Christ, the first-born of Mary, was conceived in the virginal womb of Mary, according to nature, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, so all the elect are conceived, according to the Spirit, by faith and baptism, in the same virginal womb through the tender love of Mary. . . ."³

³ Chaminade, S.F., I, par. 143.

Mary was introduced into the divine family by her maternal relation with the Son and by her unique affinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. If we repose upon her heart, if we endeavor, by our recollection, our humility, our love, and our prayer, to enter into her soul and to live her life, we too shall experience the delight of the saints in living with the most holy Trinity and with Mary upon earth, while waiting to live with them in heaven.

We saw in the chapter on *Union with Mary and Love* that intimacy with the Blessed Virgin urges the soul to make its own the love of the Mother for her Son in such a way as to become, so to say, Mary causing pleasure to Jesus in all things. This will remain the soul's great ambition. But little by little it sees its horizon expand and deepen, and feels the need of glorifying, with her, the Father and the Holy Spirit at the same time as the Son. Instinctively, at least in the more important actions, it will aspire to be Mary constantly causing pleasure to Jesus and glorifying the most holy Trinity. It will recall the ejaculatory prayer dear to Father Chaminade: "May the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Union With Mary and Love of Neighbor

To the Jewish doctor who had asked: "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." Then he added something that the doctor had not asked for: "And the second is like it: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."¹

Upon second thought this affirmation of Christ on love of neighbor seems strange. There is no common measure between God and man. Still Jesus insists on it. According to St. John He affirms that love of neighbor is a *new* commandment, *His* commandment.² He identifies the cause of the neighbor with His own. For at the last judgment He will say to those placed at His right: "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. . . ." And to their astonished question: "When did we do these things for thee?" He will reply: "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me."³ To Saul, persecutor of Christians, He addressed this reproach: "Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?"⁴

Is it simply because Jesus ordered it that we identify the cause of our neighbor with His own? No, there is a more profound reason for this identification, which Jesus explains to His intimate friends in the discourse after the Last Supper, namely, that we are one with Him. He is the vine, we are the branches.⁵ The same sap, the same

■Mt. 22:36-40.

2Jn. 13:34; 15:12 ff.

3 Mt. 25:34-45.

4 Acts 9:4.

5 Jn. 15:5.

life circulates in the vine and in the branches. St. Paul, using a similar comparison, calls Jesus the head and us the members of His body." The same blood circulates in the head and in the members. The grace which Christ merited for us on Calvary makes us "sharers in the divine nature."⁷

Jesus returns often and with emphasis to His great commandment. Because charity is His preferred virtue, it is in Him that we must seek the knowledge and the practice of it as the most important virtue. We must be eager often to scrutinize His teachings on charity. Even more than His formal teachings, His life — all His words, all His actions, and above all His Passion — will enable us to penetrate into the mystery of His love.

Of course it is under the guidance of Mary, with her at our side, that we seek to enter into the Heart of Jesus in order to understand and share that infinite love. Who understood it as she did? Above all, who reproduced it as she did? In remaking with her these meditations on her Son, how much easier it will be to absorb her sentiments toward men! By considering that the goodness of Mary, her mercy, her tenderness, her delicacy to us are only a participation of the goodness, the mercy, the tenderness, and the delicacy of her Son, we shall cause these dispositions to pass over into our hearts and we shall ask her to make us like Jesus and like herself.

In Mary's love for men there is something besides the reproduction of the love of Jesus for them. She is the mother of all men; she conceived them at Nazareth; she brought them all forth on Calvary, and at what price! Her love for them is a maternal love. Every mother loves her children with the most perfect natural love that exists here on earth. But the love of Mary for her spiritual children surpasses the purest and the most devoted, natural, motherly love that one can imagine. The reason is that Mary is the most perfect creature there is, and therefore the most capable of loving. Above all, she is mother not of our natural life, but of a life which infinitely surpasses in quality and in duration the life we have received from our natural mothers. Beside, to become our mother, she gave much more than herself, she sacrificed her first-born Son.

I am her child, even one of her children of predilection, since she has revealed to me the mystery of her spiritual maternity and has

lavished exceptional graces upon me. Why would I not share her love for her other children, my brothers and sisters? Mary is the mother of such and such an individual who has been so indifferent to me until now; she sacrificed Jesus for him; she loves him tenderly and, with inconceivable ardor, desires his good in this life and above all in the next. How could I refuse to love him? If I look at him through the eyes of my mother, I sense that I begin also to love him with the heart of my mother.

If to the eyes of faith, it is true that my neighbor is another Jesus, another child of Mary, to my natural eyes he often appears as a person who is uninteresting, narrow, egotistical, spiteful, full of himself, without any consideration for others or for me. How am I going to forget all that to see in him only Jesus and Mary? I do not have to forget; I do not have to make myself blind. Mary does not forget; she sees better than I the defects of any individual, and they displease her much more than they displease me. But at the same time she sees in him her child, the child for whom she has suffered so much and sacrificed her Son, and whom she wishes to save at all costs. I have but to regard him as she does, with his defects, yes, and yet as the child tenderly loved by our Mother in heaven. Does not a Christian mother see clearly the faults and defects of her child? Who suffers on their account more than she? And yet she loves him and wishes at all costs to bring him to heaven. If I see my neighbor through the eyes of Mary, I can recognize his faults and defects and at the same time love him with the incomparable love with which Mary loves him.

Besides our earthly brothers and sisters in God and in Mary, all of them more or less imperfect like ourselves, we have others who are quite perfect, our brothers and sisters in heaven. Among the blessed, St. Joseph occupies the first rank after his Spouse. For those who live in close union with the Blessed Virgin, devotion to St. Joseph is natural. They may say with St. Teresa of the Child Jesus: "From my childhood, devotion to St. Joseph had been interwoven with my love for Our Blessed Lady."⁸

But there are others for whom union with Mary dawned only slowly and for whom her Spouse remained a long time in darkness or at least in semidarkness. Though always ready to devote himself to Jesus and Mary and then lapse into obscurity, St. Joseph succeeded

⁸ *Saint Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower of Jesus*, p. 105.

so well in remaining hidden during his life that we are tempted to accept obscurity as his providential place. We forget that whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. But as soon as we unite ourselves to Mary to speak with her, we understand the immense love for him and gratitude which must fill her heart. And we understand her ardent desire to have us love and honor her virginal spouse. And so we set ourselves to contemplate, to love, to praise, and to invoke glorious St. Joseph as if we had always experienced the tangible effects of his goodness and his power.

Then it is the turn of the other saints. Except for those whose lives we have read, the saints are distant beings, more or less abstract, before whom we bow because of their halo, but whose fixed look toward heaven has not succeeded in warming our hearts. But one day in company with our Mother we meet them on the road and we are immediately aware of the special affection she bears them. They are her children, too, particularly loving and beloved because without her they would never have become saints. And that is why, with Mary, we love them with warm affection — Linus, Cletus, Clement, Xystus, Chrysogonus, Anastasia, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucia, and the innumerable multitude of the elect. Formerly they were only names; suddenly they become dear brothers and sisters with whom we feel as much at ease as if they were members of our family, known a long time. In fact, are they not members of our family in God the Father, Jesus our Brother, and Mary our Mother?

The Blessed Virgin, has still other children, exceedingly dear children who are separated from the family, but who long for her and for their Father. How much she desires their eternal reunion close to Jesus and the Holy Trinity!

Here again, Mary needs us. She needs our prayers and our sacrifices to pay the remaining debts of these suffering souls. What happiness we cause her, when, to forward her merciful intervention in favor of these imprisoned children, we abandon to her all our expiatory merit so that, by presenting it to the Father, she may hasten their entrance into the great family of heaven where altogether they will contemplate and bless the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forever!

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Mary and the Apostolate

Every Christian should be an apostle, for a Christian is another Christ, and Christ came to save the world. No one then, not even a layman, is a true disciple of Christ unless, like Christ, he endeavors to save men.

For does the imitation of Christ as Saviour oblige only priests and religious? Indeed, the apostolate is obligatory for the latter in a special way, but it is the duty of every Christian because every Christian must practice the great commandment of the Master, charity, and charity demands the apostolate. The law of Christ orders us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Now, the first good to procure for oneself is the salvation of one's soul. In order to assure this good, one must, if need be, sacrifice every other good — hand, foot, eye, life itself. To love one's neighbor as oneself means, above all, to procure eternal life for him, and this is the proper task of the apostolate.

But a privileged child of Mary, a person consecrated to her, has an apostolic obligation that is quite distinct. To understand it, we must understand the apostolic mission of Mary in the world.

Mary has received from God a universal apostolic mission as Co-redemptrix, as Mother, as Distributrix of all graces, as Queen of the universe.¹

As Coredeinptrix. Mary's apostolic mission is merely a continuation of her mission as Coredemptrix, just as the mission of the Apostles is merely a continuation of the Redeemer's. "As the Father has sent me," said the Saviour to the eleven, "I also send you."² Mary co-operated in the Redemption, in the whole Redemption; she should also co-operate in the mission of the Church, in other words, in the entire Catholic apostolate.

¹ On this mission see *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary*, Part II, Chap. I; *Mary in Doctrine*, pp. 125-137; *Queen of the Militants*, Part I, Chaps. III to VII.

² Jn. 20:22.

As our spiritual Mother. Every mother is the first apostle of her child; her mission is to preserve from sin the little being to whom she has given life and to make it live the supernatural life. With all the more reason is Mary the first apostle of her children, not only because she is the most accomplished of mothers, but above all because she is their supernatural mother. Her motherhood consists precisely in making us live the life of Christ. If it did not, she would not be our mother.

As Distributrix of all graces. As we have just said, the apostolate consists in making men live the life of grace. But it is through Mary that all graces come to us, particularly the grace that makes us pass from sin to supernatural life and the graces which strengthen that life in us.

As Queen of the universe. Her queenship implies an immense mission of conquest, the conquest of all the souls redeemed by Christ and by her in order to allow them to enter into their heavenly kingdom. This conquest is therefore an apostolic work.

This apostolic mission of Mary is unique in its universality and in its importance: in its universality, because Mary is Coredemptrix, Mother, Mediatrix, and Queen of *all* men; in its rank, because Mary's mission is that of a leader, whereas that of all other apostles — past, present, and future — is the mission of subordinates. Really, she alone was Coredemptrix in the work of the Redemption; she alone is the mother of all men; she alone is the Distributrix of all graces; she alone is the sovereign Queen of the universe.

After Christ and because of Christ, Mary is therefore the truest Apostle. All other men who bear this title are simply her subordinates, her instruments. Whether they are aware of it or not, they accomplish the work confided by God to her in the first place; they perform in their restricted sphere of action and for a limited time the mission which she has been given to execute for all time and in all places. They are soldiers or officers combating in the army of Christ of which the Blessed Virgin is the commander in chief.

Scripture and tradition teach that this is the mission of Mary. At the beginning of the human race, we learn from the mouth of God that the Woman will crush the serpent's head. To crush its head means to save the souls which the serpent wishes to drag into its kingdom; it means to lead these souls to Christ and the Father.

In the New Testament we see the Blessed Virgin performing acts that are pre-eminently apostolic: at Nazareth, she consents to give us a Saviour; in the house of Zachary, she sanctifies His precursor; at Bethlehem, she presents the Saviour to the Jews in the person of the shepherds and to the pagans in the person of the Magi; in the Temple at Jerusalem she offers Him to the Father in view of His mission and hears Simeon announce the infinitely dolorous part she is called upon to play in that mission; at Cana through her intervention, she strengthens the faith of the first apostles; on Calvary united to Jesus, she helps redeem the world; in the Cenacle she prays with and for the Apostles in order to obtain for them the Holy Spirit who will make them conquerors of the world.

Tradition also shows her at work exercising her apostolic mission, sometimes in matters of doctrine, sometimes in matters of everyday life. The history of orthodox belief justifies the antiphon which the Church chants: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary; thou alone hast conquered all the heresies of the whole world." The story of the Church's struggles in the defense of Christian morals shows her inspiring the great apostolic men who, periodically, came to preach penance and bring people back to purity of life. Even more, history recounts the story of religious orders founded under the inspiration of Mary, with the mission to preach her mysteries and her grandeurs in order to help her bring souls to Christ. Such are the *Servîtes* of Mary, the two Societies of Mary — Marists and Marianists, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Pallottines, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and others. Alongside these religious societies, lay associations propose the same end to themselves: the Marian Sodalities, the Militia of the Immaculate founded by Father Kolbe, and, above all, the Legion of Mary.

Sometimes Mary herself appears in order to communicate her apostolic orders. We have but to recall the apparitions at la Rue du Bac in Paris (1830), at La Salette (1846), at Lourdes (1858), at Pontmain (1871), at Fatima (1917), at Beauraing (1932), and Ban-neux (1933) — to mention only those upon which the Church has pronounced favorably.

All the Popes since Pius IX, namely, Leo XIII, St. Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI, and, more than all the others, Pius XII, have proclaimed

this mission of Mary and have had recourse to her as their final hope in the calamities of the times.

This mission of Mary imposes a quite special apostolic obligation upon her children.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Our Co-operation in the Apostolic Mission of Mary

THE mission of Mary imposes upon her children a special apostolic mission. Why? Is she not all-powerful by her prayer? Was it not foretold that she would crush the head of the serpent? Does she need us? Yes, Jesus Himself needs us. Pope Pius XII teaches this explicitly in his encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ. He writes:

Because Christ the Head holds such an eminent position, one must not think that He does not require the Body's help. What Paul said of the human organism is to be applied likewise to this Mystical Body: "The head cannot say to the feet: I have no need of you." . . .

This, too, must be held, marvelous though it appear: Christ requires members. . . .

This is not because He is indigent and weak, but rather because He has so willed it for the greater glory of His unspotted Spouse. . . .

Deep mystery this, subject of inexhaustible meditation: that the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary penances which the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ offer for this intention, and on the assistance of pastors of souls and of the faithful. . . ?

It is the same with Mary. She needs the collaboration of our prayer, of our mortification, and of our apostolic work. If this collaboration fails, a great number of her children will not be saved.

She therefore needs collaborators. That is why she inspired several of her great servants to found the religious orders and Marian associations mentioned in the preceding chapter. But these are not sufficient. Just as not only priests and religious, but all Christians, must be apostles of Christ, so also, besides these founders, every true child of Mary must aid his Mother.

¹ The Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pope Pius XII, prepared for study clubs by Joseph Bluett, S.J., The America Press, pp. 20-21.

How could it be otherwise? For the accomplishment of her mission Mary needs auxiliaries. It is the duty of children to help their mother when she needs help.

Mary must crush the head of the serpent. Ceaselessly the serpent seeks to wound her heel, that is, her children—to snatch from her as large a portion as possible of those she had redeemed with her Son on Calvary. Will her loyal children consent to such a partial defeat of their Immaculate Mother when, with their help, she could gain complete victory over her eternal enemy?

These souls in danger of being lost are children of the Blessed Virgin just as we are. For them as well as for us she has suffered an unspeakable martyrdom during her entire life; she sacrificed her first-born Son for them. They are our brothers and sisters. A Christian mother seeing one of her children on the road to perdition, in anguish, desires to save him. And if the other children could help her efficaciously to bring their wavering brother or sister back to God, but remained indifferent to his conversion and to the agony of their mother, would they not be considered unnatural? How much more than this Christian mother does not our heavenly Mother desire her true children to help save those who are running the risk of damnation? Would it not be mere egotism to take pleasure in the benefits and the consolations we receive from Mary and remain indifferent to the eternal fate of her wayward children?

Once we have understood the apostolic mission of Mary and the need she has of collaborators, we will either do everything in our power to be her true apostles, or stop believing that we are her true children. And the more we wish to be her children, the more we will be her apostles.

It is well known that in his *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary* St. Louis Mary de Montfort speaks of Mary's struggle with Satan and prophesies the coming of great apostles entirely consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. A number of those who acknowledge de Montfort's leadership, particularly the members of the immense Legion of Mary, work out their apostolate only under the name of Mary Immaculate, the great antagonist of Satan. Father Chaminade, who understood the mission of Mary in these modern times at the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar, accepted her command of organizing a double army of apostles to help in this mission. And so he founded the

Society of Mary and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, whose members, by their religious profession, and in particular by a special vow of perseverance in the service of Mary, oblige themselves "to assist her to the end of their lives in her struggle against hell . . . convinced that they will bring men back to Jesus only through his most holy Mother."

When the essential relationship between devotion to Mary and the Marian apostolate is better understood by the great multitude of souls consecrated to her, the triumph of the Woman over the ancient serpent will be evident to all eyes, for the greater glory of Christ and His Mother, for the salvation of the world, and for the confusion of hell.

CHAPTER FORTY

Weapons of the Marian Apostolate

The weapons of the Marian apostolate are those of every supernatural apostolate, those which our Lord, the Master and Model of all apostles, used in His redemptive mission: example, prayer, preaching, suffering. To give these means their full efficacy we should Marianize them.

Of old it has been said that though words sound nice, example attracts men and leads them on. Whoever shows that he is a worthy disciple of Christ by the practice of all the natural and supernatural virtues, wins esteem and love for his Master. Every genuine child of Mary shows himself a worthy disciple of Christ: Mary forms him to resemble her Son. Besides, *noblesse oblige*; honor imposes duties upon us. The child of Mary honors his Mother by living without blame; he would dishonor her by conduct that scandalizes others.

Prayer obtains for the apostle the grace of touching hearts, of convincing, of persuading, of converting others, of confirming them in good. The soul for whom the apostle prays obtains the grace of listening, of being touched, of wishing to return to God, of persevering in that resolution.

The apostle offers his prayers to the Blessed Virgin so that her intentions be realized in the soul that he wishes to lead to God. His prayer may be directly Marian, in the rosary particularly. He must continue to pray and not be discouraged, for God often delays a desired grace because He wills to grant a greater grace that must be merited by a stronger faith.

Properly speaking, it is by His Passion and death that Christ redeemed us. By her union with Christ suffering and dying Mary became the Coredemptrix. Whoever wishes to save souls must necessarily follow the way traced by the Saviour and His Associate. For

the good of souls, then, we must offer all our sufferings, small and great, which follow one another in the course of the day. Sometimes we must even freely impose mortifications upon ourselves without complaining, without admitting vexation or discouragement, but through love, love for souls which must be saved, love for Jesus and Mary who allow us to assist them efficaciously in the redemption of the world. United to her, the child of Mary learns more quickly and more thoroughly that the mystery of love is the mystery of suffering, and instead of complaining, he will be thankful; instead of being discouraged, he will rejoice.

Direct action varies with persons. It may be a service rendered, a counsel given, a word of encouragement, a word of consolation, a charitable warning. If no occasion presents itself, one must be created. How clever the children of this world are to find or to make opportunities for sowing their perverse ideas everywhere! Must the children of light be less eager and less capable than they? Favorable occasions are not found because we do not seek them, or because we prefer not to find them. Draw close to Mary; she will not fail to indicate the means to help save her wayward children.

The most efficacious apostolate is to make Mary directly known, loved, and served. As soon as we have introduced the Blessed Virgin into another's life, she will assume the responsibility of forming him to the likeness of Jesus and of inspiring him with her own passion for the salvation and sanctification of her other children. Making someone a convinced apostle of Mary is more than making a hundred ordinary Christians, for the influence of such an apostle expands indefinitely. Can one be really convinced by personal experience of the almost miraculous efficacy of union with Mary, without having a burning desire to propagate that conviction among all persons capable of understanding it? Love of Mary and love of souls make this apostolate a duty and a necessity.¹

¹ See *My Ideal, Jesus Son of Mary*, Part IV, Chap. VIII.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Absolute Confidence in Mary in Our Apostolate

ALL the weapons of the apostolate, especially prayer and action, are powerless without supernatural confidence. On the other hand, accompanied by great confidence, prayer and action are infallible. Union with Mary will supply this confidence.

It is true of every Christian, and with all the more reason of every Marian soul, that it has never been heard that anyone invoked the Blessed Virgin without receiving help. Our Mother of mercy, the Mediatrix of all graces, is so powerful and so good to all those who invoke her, even those who are sinners.

But in the apostolate undertaken in the name of Mary, her children possess a motive for confidence that is quite apart: they are not working for their own interests, but for the very interests of Mary. It is she, and not they, who has been established as the conqueror of the empire of Satan; her children, not theirs, have to be rescued from sin and led to heaven.

Whoever has understood that his apostolate is only a participation in the apostolate of the Blessed Virgin, that there is really question of her interests and of those of her Son — such a person can no longer have the least doubt about the efficacy of apostolic prayers addressed to her. It is sufficient for him merely to ask the Blessed Virgin to accomplish her designs of love upon the souls with whom he is occupied. Since he knows that the loving designs of the Blessed Virgin are immensely more worthy than his own, he is sure to obtain even more than what he asks for.

Is there some defect in this reasoning? One might press the point and say: "Mary desires the salvation of all men; if I ask her for the accomplishment of her desires in favor of sinners, will she not send them all to heaven?" No, because the desires of Mary are conformable

to the will of God, and God has decided to save men through the co-operation of other men, through the co-operation of those in particular whom He has called to the direct apostolate. He has based the salvation of all men upon the co-operation not of a single apostle, but of all, and we may believe that if all those called to the apostolate were fully faithful to their mission, to their *whole* mission, absolutely all men would be saved, except those who voluntarily sin against the light, those who falsify their conscience and become obstinate in evil; for them it would have been better had they not been born.

I do not have to preach to all men. God has decided that a greater or lesser number of them will be touched by my apostolic action. How? I do not know. But I do know that if I am faithful in praying, suffering, and laboring for that number, as much as Mary requires of me, I will be able to obtain for all of them the special graces they need for salvation. If I appeal to her with genuine trust, even if certain individuals for whom I pray do not wish to profit by my prayer, such prayer will not remain sterile. The Blessed Virgin will transfer the profit to others whom I myself would prefer to aid if I knew consciences as well as she knows them. I can therefore always ask my heavenly Mother with infallible confidence to realize her loving designs upon the souls that I must save.

Without the least doubt, confidence in Mary in our apostolic activity is not less necessary than prayer, although practically, perhaps, it is more difficult. But where such confidence exists, victory is certain, for there is question here of the mission which God has confided to Mary and of children whom she has brought forth at the price of much sorrow and above all of the death of her Son. Without any doubt she will triumph if we give her the co-operation she expects.

Therefore, all the great servants of Mary understood the character of the apostolate exercised in her name and in the midst of the greatest obstacles were unshakable in their confidence. For them, to act in the name of Mary meant to participate in the victory of her who is to crush the head of the serpent. Father Chaminade explained to his disciples that union with Mary was to be the "real secret" of their success.¹ They were all to be "true missionaries of Mary." "True missioners must not count at all upon themselves, upon their labors, their talents, their industry, but must place all their trust in

¹ S.F., I, par. 90.

the grace of their mission and in the protection of the Blessed Virgin, since they labor at the work for which she has been elevated to the divine maternity."² "We must be confident of converting the whole world under the protection of Mary."³ Hence Father Chaminade could write to the Duke of Montmorency: "Father Caillet . . . will tell you of the blessings which heaven lavishes upon this nascent Society. You will not be astonished at this, knowing that we never join battle except under the banner of the august Mother of God."⁴

The same principles and the same applications can be found in the Legion of Mary. "The spirit of the Legion of Mary," as the Official Handbook states, "is that of Mary herself."⁵ "And so bearing her name with an inexpressible pride, built as an organization upon an unbounded and childlike trust in her . . . the Legion of Mary does not think it presumption, but rather the correct degree of confidence, to believe that its system forms, as it were, a mechanism which Mary will deign to use as an agency to accomplish her maternal work for souls, and to carry on her perpetual mission of crushing the head of the serpent."⁶ "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." To these words, addressed to Satan by almighty God, the Legion turns as the source of its confidence and strength in its warfare with sin. It aims with all its heart to become in its entirety the seed, the children of Mary. For there is the pledge of victory. In the measure that it makes her more and more its Mother, the Legion's enmity with the powers of evil is intensified and victory is made more complete."⁸

Who has not heard of the victories gained by the Legion in the name of Mary? After hardly thirty years of existence it has spread over territories occupied by half the population of the world; it already counts several million active and auxiliary members; everywhere it obtains astonishing results: adult baptisms, fréquentation of the sacraments, validation of marriages, the conversion of individuals given

² *Lettres de M. Chaminade*, III, 378.

³ S.F., I, par. 130.

⁴ *Lettres de M. Chaminade*, II, 14.

⁵ *Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, Third American Edition, Louisville, Ky., p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷ Gen. 3:15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

over to vice and to the perversion of others, the return to the Church of paganized parishes, the maintenance of the faith of persecuted Chinese Christians, and this last at the peril of their lives. A handful of young people, marvelously effective in localities where priests and teams of missionaries have been powerless, has done these things. It is a first principle among the legionaries that alone they are weakness itself, but with Mary, in whose name they accomplish their work, they are irresistible.

They always keep this principle in mind and at heart. In their weekly reunion the account of the past week and the distribution of tasks for the coming week hold little place. The program is preceded, interspersed, and followed by prayers to Mary, by readings and addresses generally relative to the Blessed Virgin. The two hours of apostolic work each week, by the fact that it interrupts ordinary occupations, recalls quite naturally that the special task is allotted to them in the name of their heavenly Mother. Besides, the accounts of the marvelous results achieved right and left by the Legion only serve to intensify their confidence. As in the case of those who followed Christ, it is easier to believe at the sight of miracles wrought.

In another state of life, on the contrary, priests and religious men and women devoted to the apostolate must prepare for it by long years of study. They have to be concerned ceaselessly with perfecting and renewing their techniques. They must give themselves to tasks the greater part of which are not directly apostolic, such as teaching and the care of the sick. By concentrating upon the means, they run the risk of losing sight of the end. And it is hardly possible for them to see the supernatural results which would encourage them. By way of compensation, however, they possess exceptional means of living a supernatural life of prayer, of renouncement, and of fruitful apostolic action. They give to their apostolic task not only two hours a week, but all the free moments of every day. As a matter of fact, there are many holy priests and religious who have constantly exercised and who still exercise a profound action upon countless souls.

Yet we must acknowledge — and it does not seem rash to affirm — that many souls consecrated to an apostolic mission seem to bother more about their external activity than about their supernatural apostolate. What do they lack? Undoubtedly, many things. They certainly

do not understand the apostolic role of Mary and the implications of a life of close union with her; they are not true apostles of Mary.

The apostle of Mary understands the mission of the Immaculate Virgin in the world, especially in these times. He understands her immense desire to save all her unfortunate children. He understands that Mary has called him to serve in her redemptive mission, and that she counts upon him. He is happy to give himself to her unreservedly and forever in her struggle against hell. Enlightened by his_Mother, he distinguishes well between means and end; and if he always strives to discover more perfect means, it is only to attain the end more surely.

Consultation with Mary in the apostolate is of such importance for acting uniquely in her name that it is worthwhile underlining again what has been said in Chapter Ten on that practice. Eager temperaments will say they find it useless to consult the Blessed Virgin: they know already what has to be done and they know how to do it. But do they really know what is to be done? They have taken so many steps that should not have been taken, and omitted so many others that should have been made. And do they know how to act? How often they fail because they have acted unwisely! Let us even suppose that they know what has to be done and how to do it, and that in consulting Mary they find nothing to change in their plans, there is always an immense difference between acting in one's own name and acting in the name of Mary. The external activity may be identical; the supernatural result, quite different. It is like the difference between a check of a hundred thousand dollars unsigned and one that is properly signed. There is even a natural difference between the two attitudes. After having received Mary's approbation for what has been submitted to her, a person proceeds with unshakable confidence; this confidence does not exist when he acts in his own name. And confidence is a natural factor in success.

Before each apostolic action, the Marian soul will consult its Mother on how to do the most possible good to souls. After the action, he will see with Mary whether the success corresponds to the effort, in order to thank her if that is the case, or to find a better way for another time.

In especially delicate circumstances, particularly when there is advice

to give or a remark to make, a person will be careful above all to say nothing without the previous advice of the Mother of Good Counsel.

The novices of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus expressed their surprise to her one day when they remarked that she guessed their most intimate thoughts. She replied:

Here is my secret. I never make remarks to you before I have invoked the Blessed Virgin. I ask her to inspire me with what will do you the most good. Often I myself am astonished at the things I teach you. In telling you these things, I feel simply that I am not mistaken, and that Jesus speaks through me.

Was it she that suggested to her faithful disciple, Edel Mary Quinn, the resolution "never to make a remark without first submitting it to the Blessed Virgin"? Perhaps Miss Quinn's constant union with Mary would have discovered it alone.⁹

Here is an instance, related by the director of a religious community:

Ordinarily I invoked the Blessed Virgin before making remarks to my Brothers. One day I made a remark to a young religious who was very touchy; there was question of such a very little thing — and I spoke almost jokingly — that I did not think of first casting a glance toward Mary. And did I pay for it! There was an explosion of anger and absurd reproaches. "That's what you deserve," I said to myself, "for forgetting the Blessed Virgin." Since that incident, I do not remember ever having made a remark without speaking of it beforehand to Mary. Sometimes I have had particularly delicate suggestions to make and I wondered how they would be received. Each time they were well accepted. Sometimes I would be sincerely thanked for the observation. At other times, even if nature received a jolt, the point was taken to heart.

The apostle of Mary may well err, above all if he acts hastily, without looking up to Mary. He will ask her to repair the damage done so that no harm comes of it.¹⁰ Sometimes he fails. He will then speak of it to his Mother. If it was a real failure, he must have forgotten to act in the name of Mary, and he will profit by the lesson.

⁹ *Une Héroïne de l'Apostolat, Edel-Mary Quinn*, by Mgr. Leon-Joseph Suenens, p. 224.

¹⁰ A prayer of Edel Quinn: "May Mary grant a new fervor today to those who waver; may she sanctify those who have been good to me in her name; may she make my mistakes and failures serve unto good." *Ibid.*, p. 259.

If it was only an apparent failure, Mary will make it count toward the triumph of her cause. In any case, close to her, he will find light and strength.

Thus, even with limited natural talents, an apostle of Mary will do great good to souls, for he will allow Mary to act through him according to her intentions. And Mary's power and intentions are those of her Son. This is a first principle for an apostle of Mary: "Without Mary, no success; with her, no failure!"

PART II

MYSTICAL UNION WITH MARY

CHAPTER ONE

Explanation of Terms

THE union with Mary which we have discussed until now is an acquired or ordinary union, that is, a union to which a faithful soul may aspire through its own efforts supported by grace. It is possible for every soul of good will to reach some degree of this union.

In treating of the relations of the soul with God, spiritual authors distinguish, besides ordinary or acquired union, another union, called mystical, or sometimes supernatural, "which we cannot acquire by ourselves, no matter what care or what diligence we apply. In this regard all that we can do is to dispose ourselves to it," according to the testimony of St. Teresa to Father Rodrigo Alvarez. This union is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Authors who have described mystic graces speak of apparitions and other supernatural interventions of the Blessed Virgin, but not of an habitual mystic union with her.¹ Yet the interior life of a sufficiently large number of Marian souls, especially in these latter times, reveals certain attitudes in regard to the Blessed Virgin which seem to present the character of mystical phenomena. We shall meet a number of them in these pages.

In his *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary*, St. Louis Mary de Montfort, explaining the formula "to perform all one's actions *in Mary*,"¹ supposes, besides the acquired union, another union which is a gratuitous gift of God. Thus he speaks in enthusiastic terms, but rather mysteriously, of the "true terrestrial paradise of the new

¹ There is hardly more than one exception, Father Michael of St. Augustine, a Discalced Carmelite, the spiritual director of the great Marian mystic of the seventeenth century, Mary of St. Theresa. His work, *Introduction to the Land of Carmel and Enjoyment of Its Fruits*, contains an appendix entitled *The Mary-form and Marian Life in Mary and by Mary*, in which the author is inspired greatly by the experiences of his penitent (Spanish translation published in 1936 at Barcelona, Editorial Vilamala).

Adam," which is the Virgin Mary, and he adds: "The miserable children of Adam and Eve, expelled from the earthly paradise, cannot enter this one except by a *particular grace of the Holy Spirit* which they must merit. After one has obtained this special grace, *by one's fidelity*, one must remain in the beautiful interior of Mary. . . ."2

In *The Secret of Mary*, destined for choice souls, he is more explicit. He shows how one must grow accustomed to recollect oneself in Mary and adds: "Be very careful not to torment yourself if you do not enjoy soon enough the sweet presence of the Blessed Virgin in your interior: *This grace is not made for all. . . . God bestows it as a favor through His great mercy.*"3

In a retreat conference to his disciples Father Chaminade said: "There are some who have the gift of the presence of Jesus Christ and of the Blessed Virgin, but it is rare. One must be most faithful to merit it."4 He speaks clearly, therefore, of a *gift*, that is, of a mystical grace, which accompanies the gift of the presence of our Lord, that of the presence of Mary.

Mystical graces are of two kinds, ordinary and extraordinary. The former consists of the simple consciousness which the soul has of the presence and the action of God in its interior. The latter comprises the exceptional phenomena which affect the exterior or interior senses and sometimes the highest part of the mind, such as apparitions, interior and exterior words, prophecies, ecstasies, levitation, etc. The former graces may be a great help for the sanctification of the subject; they usually increase love, confidence, courage, and rarely expose the recipient to the danger of self-seeking; therefore they are desirable and one may ask God for them. The latter, if they are real, are gifts of God, which one must venerate as we venerate anything that comes from Him. But they lend themselves more easily to illusion, to vanity, to eccentric conduct of the subject or of those whom He influences. Therefore we must exercise great reserve with

« Nos. 261-264.

® No. 47.

4 Notes of M. Laugeay, third copybook, p. 529, Marianist archives, Rome. The text which I cited in my article in *La Vie Spirituelle*, 1937, p. 15, which contains the same ideas but under a slightly different form, is taken from the *Spirit of Our Foundation*, I, par. 133. The editor does not pretend to cite the literal text, for he omits the quotation marks.

them, examine them, and have them examined by authority. And we must refrain from desiring them.

Marian mystical graces are also ordinary and extraordinary. As we said above, we shall concern ourselves here directly only with the former, which are desirable and of a nature to render our union with Mary more loving, confident, and constant. We shall mention the latter only in connection with the ordinary mystic graces on which they may have some bearing.

CHAPTER TWO

Nature of Ordinary Mystical Union With Mary

In what does ordinary mystical union with Mary essentially consist? Let us cite the experiences of some Marian souls.

Sister Mary Colette of the Sacred Heart, a Poor Clare of the monastery of Besançon, who died in 1905, wrote:

It seems to me that Mary never leaves me. Although she is not visible, I feel her presence and her protection.¹

And again:

I do well to beg the Blessed Virgin often to prepare me to receive our Lord in Holy Communion. I am so unworthy of such a great act and all my preparation amounts to so little, that I am very much consoled when my good heavenly Mother comes to my rescue by lending me her heart and also her own dispositions. And the love which I felt for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and which seemed so weak before, is only coldness and indifference in comparison with what I now experience for Him. It seems to me that it is no longer a tiny flame that escapes from a poor and narrow heart, but a blazing furnace which consumes me with love for the adorable sacrament, which is my God, Himself made love for me in order to give Himself every day.¹

The venerable Louis Edward Cestac was also favored with the gift of the presence of Mary. One day he was asked whether he saw the Blessed Virgin. He replied:

No, I do not see her, but I feel her as the horse feels the hand of the rider that leads him.³

¹ *Soeur Marie Colette du Sacré Coeur, Clarisse du monastère de Besançon*, according to her spiritual notes, 1857-1905, by Rev. J. J. Navatcl, Paris, Gigord, p. 208.

² *Ibid.*, p. 290 fl.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 458.

The Flemish recluse, Mary of St. Theresa, explains this presence at some length; she writes:

I do not know really whether I understand myself well or not. But by habitually possessing this amiable Mother in heart and in sentiment, it seems to me that my spirit is directed, is lived, so to say, and possessed by the spirit of Mary, both actively and passively; that the spirit of Mary accomplishes all things through me, just as formerly the spirit of Jesus seemed to direct and be the life of my soul, which for a time seemed possessed by Him. Then the spirit of Jesus accomplished all things through me; and under His guidance and action, I seemed to be carried along, to be passive. I was conscious of the life of Jesus in me, and it was manifested in me.

Today, almost in the same manner, the spirit of Mary seems to live in me, to command the movements made by the powers of the soul, to set them in motion and to impel them to act or not to act, so that they may live in God in a new way not yet experienced until today. Thus Mary appears as our life, or as a warm atmosphere giving life, in which and through which we breathe in God in a higher and nobler way than ever before. . . .

The maternal love and the favors of this sweet Mother manifest themselves with such brilliance and such evidence that there cannot be the least uncertainty or the least suspicion of illusion, or any mixture of sentiments of the natural order. She has taken me under her Motherly guidance and direction, just as a teacher guides the hand of the child in teaching it to write. While writing, the child does not move its hand unless the teacher directs and guides it; and the child lets itself be moved and guided by the hand of the teacher.

I feel in the same position, placed entirely under the authority of this very gentle mother who leads and guides me; and my look remains unceasingly fixed upon her so that she may do in all things what most pleases her and what she wills. And she deigns also to show me clearly, to make me understand and recognize, what she desires in such and such a circumstance, whether to do something or not. It would be almost impossible for me to act otherwise since she remains before my soul almost without interruption, drawing me on in such an amiable and motherly fashion, smiling upon me, stimulating me, leading and instructing me in the path of the spirit and in the practice of perfect virtue. In that way I do not for a single moment lose the taste of her presence alongside that of God.⁴

⁴ *L'Union mystique à Marie*, by Marie de Sainte Thérèse, Cahiers de la Vierge, No. 15, pp. 62 f., 65 f.

Here is the statement of a living person:

In my union with Mary, I feel that she is, as it were, uniting her perfect dispositions of soul to my poor dispositions. I believe in Jesus with her faith, I hope in Him with her (former) hope, I love Him with her love; and so I am certain to cause much more pleasure to our Lord because it is His Mother who causes Him pleasure in me and with me.

In Chapter VII of his *Treatise*, St. Louis Mary de Montfort writes enthusiastically of "the marvelous effects which Mary produces in the soul that is faithful." He returns to the subject in the *Secret*:

Let us work, my dear soul, and let us act in such a way that, by the faithful practice of this devotion, the soul of Mary may be in us to glorify the Lord, that the spirit of Mary may be in us so as to rejoice in God her Saviour. Those are the words of St. Ambrose. . . .

The faithful practice of this devotion produces an infinity of effects in the soul. But the principal effect is to establish here below the life of Mary in the soul, so that it is no longer the soul that lives, but Mary in it, for the soul of Mary, so to say, becomes our soul. Now when by an ineffable, but veritable, grace the divine Mary is Queen in a soul, what marvels does she not perform there? As she is the worker of great marvels, particularly in the interior, she works there secretly, even without the awareness of the soul which, if it knew what was happening, would destroy the beauty of her work. . . .

Finally, Mary becomes all things to that soul in the presence of Jesus Christ; she enlightens its mind by her pure faith, she penetrates its heart by her humility, she expands and embraces it by her charity, she purifies it by her purity, she ennobles and enhances it by her maternity. But where shall I stop? Only experience teaches the marvels of Mary, marvels unbelievable to the learned and proud, and even to common clients.⁸

⁸ Nos. 54, 55, 57. Father de Gioriviere was favored with many mystical graces among which he mentions several times the sense of the presence of Mary (*Maria*, III, 314 f.). St. Anthony Claret, founder of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, spent his entire life in close union with Mary. He was favored with many extraordinary mystical graces, even with a certain mystical transformation into Mary (cf. Alberto Barrios Moneo, C.M.F., *La Espiritualidad Cordimariana de San Antonio Maria Claret*, Madrid, 1954).

A person may be favored with extraordinary mystical graces without enjoying the ordinary mystical union. That is usually the case with children who are favored with apparitions and messages of the Blessed Virgin, as at La Salette, Lourdes, Pontmain, and Fatima. These charismata were granted to them for a special mission and not

The essence of ordinary mystical union with Mary seems to consist, then, in the consciousness of an interior activity attributed to her, in activity which perfects the dispositions of the soul by adding her dispositions and by directing all its actions according to the intentions of its Mother with a view to closer union with God. The awareness of that activity of Mary may be more or less intense, or even overpowering to a point where the soul feels itself, as it were, possessed by Mary, identified with her; it feels that she is, so to speak, the soul of its soul.

There is question then of a certain presence of Mary. The expression "presence of Mary" may mean a presence exterior to the soul, by which Mary is considered very near, as was explained in the fourth chapter of the first part. But in the *gift* of the presence of Mary there is question of an interior presence. In the case of certain Marian souls, an exterior mystical presence also exists, but then we are dealing with an extraordinary mystical phenomenon.

Is this mystical presence of Mary identical with the mystical presence of Jesus? We have heard Mary of St. Theresa and Father Chaminade associate the two kinds of presence. In fact there is a very close relationship between the two, but not an identity: Jesus resides and acts in us; Mary does not reside in us, but she acts in us.

By sanctifying grace we have become "partakers of the divine nature."⁶ God dwells in us in an altogether singular fashion. The soul is His living tabernacle; it acts by Him; it lives His life. "It is no longer I that live," declares St. Paul, "but Christ lives in me."⁷ To speak truly, it is not the humanity of Christ that dwells in us. His humanity is present only in heaven and in the Blessed Sacrament. But since His humanity makes only one person with His divinity and since His divinity lives in our soul, it may be said that the person of Christ, or simply Christ, lives in us.

But the humanity of Christ acts in us. It acts in a mysterious but in a very real manner. All supernatural life comes to us *from* the

for their personal sanctification. The gift of ordinary mystical union, however, may have been granted to them later. Persons who habitually enjoyed exceptional favors, from a given moment in their lives, without doubt also knew ordinary mystical union. But in their accounts it is difficult to distinguish what refers to the one or the other of these gifts. Generally they use the same terms for both and often the two are simultaneous.

⁶2 Pet. 1:4.

⁷Gal. 2:20.

divinity as from a principal agent, and *through* the humanity of Christ as through an instrumental agent.

Mary does not reside in the soul any more than does the humanity of Christ. Father Chaminade, speaking to his disciples about the gift of the presence of Mary, is careful to recall that "the Blessed Virgin is not in our midst in the same way as our Lord Jesus Christ."⁸ If, as we shall see, a certain number of Marian souls speak of the presence of Mary within them, we must understand the word "presence" as an almost constant awareness of the action of Mary in their interior. In fact, when they address themselves to the Blessed Virgin, they do not enter into their inner sanctuary but instinctively think of Mary as before them or at their side. Besides, as we shall see in Chapter Four, the soul begins by feeling *inhabited by God*, whereas it senses *Mary united to it* in order to love God more.

⁸ Notes of M. Laugeay, Retreat of 1824, S.F., I, par. 131.

CHAPTER THREE

Dispositions Favoring the Reception of the Gift of the Presence of Mary

Speaking of the gift of the presence of Mary and of its rarity, Father Chaminade adds: "One must be most faithful to merit it." To merit it means to prepare for it, supposing that God wills to accord it; for what one merits strictly is not a gift, but a remuneration. In the same sense the Church says that Mary merited to become the Mother of God. The prayer that follows the *Salve Regina* reads thus: "Almighty, eternal God, who by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary so that she might *merit* to become the fit habitation of Thy Son. . . ." St. Louis de Montfort, speaking of life *in Mary*, calls it a particular grace of the Holy Spirit which the faithful "must merit";¹ that is to say, they must dispose themselves for it.

In what does the fidelity consist which predisposes the soul for the reception of this gift? In fidelity to the requirements of this grace. According to the experience of certain Marian souls the requirements can be summed up as follows:

1. A generous life of total self-surrender;
2. A Christocentric spiritual life;
3. A profound recollection of soul in its interior sanctuary;
4. An exceptional confidence in Mary marked by constant efforts toward a more and more intimate life of union with her.

First, *the total gift of the soul to God*. This gift must be faithfully lived out in practice. This means giving oneself to God without reserve, without recall, without complaint, without regret, and that, in the midst of all difficulties foreseen and unforeseen, cost what

¹ *Treatise*, No. 263.

it may. Devout souls, in moments of fervor, particularly religious on the day of their profession, are, or believe they are, firmly determined to realize this total gift. But when it comes to living up to this donation in the midst of troubles, darkness, disgust, contradictions, and temptations of all sorts, the generous promise of yesteryear often seems to have been only a naïve dream.

The total gift of oneself comprises a positive and a negative part. The positive part consists in fidelity to God's will and even to His simple preference. As soon as it is clear that God wills or desires a thing, it is given to Him even without asking whether it is obligatory or not. As soon as God desires anything, love acts, no matter what the cost. Total donation does not necessarily suppose great macerations or long hours of prayer. Many austere persons, who daily recite protracted, pious formulas do not really make the total gift of self and so they never reach supernatural contemplation. Others, without subjecting themselves to exacting mortifications or to hours of multiplied devotions, receive this special grace. The reason is that at every instant they do what they know to be the will of God in their regard.

The negative part of this total gift supposes flight from every sin, mortal or venial, and even from every deliberate imperfection, such as, for a religious, the conscious violation of his rule.

To arrive at the mystical life is it necessary, if not absolutely at least practically, never to have committed a mortal sin? Not at all. God, in according this favor, seems to consider only actual aversion for all sin. It is not rare to meet souls favored with extraordinary graces, who formerly, perhaps during long years, had lived in grave sin, while beside them are souls who have kept their baptismal innocence and yet live in average fervor, sometimes even in lukewarmness. "The Spirit breathes where it will." Sometimes the cause of this apparent anomaly can be surmised. Fallen souls feel their nothingness, their powerlessness, their profound misery more easily than those who have never had occasion to cast eyes upon an abyss of former corruption. Humility brings one closer to God than the simple absence of sin.

It is easy to understand that the total gift of oneself to God implies the determination to avoid every fault and even every voluntary imperfection; for the man who seeks himself and takes himself back has not really given himself without reserve. What certain devout persons understand even less is that total consecration implies also a struggle

without truce or mercy against every tendency of secret self-seeking. What are those manifestations of jealousy, of susceptibility, of rancor which we are astonished to discover at times among devout souls if not evident proofs of self-seeking? Whoever has given himself entirely to Jesus has no other interests except those of Jesus. He sees all things as Jesus sees them and judges them with the sentiments of Jesus. Is it Jesus who is jealous or touchy or spiteful in these souls? If they really belonged entirely to Him, either they would not experience these sentiments, or they would disavow them at once. In order to act as He would act in their place, they would rejoice at the good that is done by others and to others; they would be willing, like Him, to be despised and misunderstood; they would pardon from the bottom of their heart and would pray for those who might have harmed or humiliated them.

Then there are complex souls preoccupied with drawing attention upon themselves. Whoever seeks only Jesus goes straight to Him in all simplicity and is sure to find Him; and whoever has given himself to Him alone detests drawing attention to himself. The greatest obstacle to mystic union is without doubt unacknowledged intellectual pride which, while compatible with great penances and long prayers, still takes pleasure in its intellectual or spiritual superiority and refuses to acknowledge its errors either publicly or privately.

This first condition for obtaining the gift of the presence of Mary is evidently not easy to fulfill. But Mary is all-powerful for whoever confides in her. Total consecration to her, as St. Louis Mary de Montfort taught expressly, is a marvelous means of giving oneself totally to Jesus. The desires of Jesus are the desires of Mary. Sin and imperfection sadden her as they sadden Him. Mary gives the will and the strength to avoid these evils.

We have already seen how to detect quickly and surely those camouflaged movements of self-seeking by communicating to Mary our impressions and emotions, particularly those of satisfaction and bad humor. Or again, we must, with Mary's help, turn our attention to the center of interest which is the cause of our more frequent and more persistent distractions. Souls who apply all their generosity to the use of these means may notice nevertheless that movements of vanity, jealousy, rancor, a thousand times disavowed, keep on returning, sometimes suddenly. They should not be discouraged. God may

permit the soul that is detached from everything else a recurrent evil tendency. This foible maintains in him the sentiment of personal powerlessness. Besides, God gives him the grace never to yield voluntarily. The humility which the knowledge of this weakness causes affords more pleasure to God than would exemption from every voluntary imperfection. And if that is more pleasing to Jesus, it should also be more pleasing to us.

Second condition: *a Christocentric spirituality*. See Chapters Thirty and Thirty-One of the first part.

Third requirement: *a profound interior spirit*. God lives in our soul, and makes us live His life. We must possess an interior spirit if we hope to be attentive to His visits. At first thought this retirement into our interior seems to leave the soul empty and inactive. But if the soul believes and loves, it soon feels itself in contact with God and receives light, strength, and fruitfulness. It sees the divine realities more clearly, since it is not distracted by external things, and above all since it is enlightened by the action of the Holy Spirit. It feels stronger, because it is withdrawn from external influences and because power from on high compensates its weakness. It is more fruitful, because it sees what it has to do, because it will and can do it. It shares in the fruitfulness of the divine Spirit. In the interior spirit it possesses itself and is possessed by God. Reread the enthusiastic words of the *Imitation of Christ* on the advantages of the interior life, in particular the first chapter of the second book.

Christ will come to you offering His consolation if you prepare a fit dwelling for Him in your heart. . . .

His visits with the inward man are frequent, His communion sweet and full of consolation, His peace great, and His intimacy wonderful indeed.

Read also Book II, Chapter I: "On the familiar conversation of Jesus with the soul"; Chapter II: "Truth speaks within us without any noise of words"; Chapter III: "That one must listen to the word of God with humility, and that many do not pay any attention to this word."

By breaking decidedly with everything that exteriorized her during twenty years of evasions from God, Teresa of Avila found herself suddenly favored with marvelous mystic graces and began that Car-

melite reform which produced, and continues to produce, in the entire world, so many holy souls, so many powerful collaborators of the apostles of Christ.

What a subject of deep sorrow it is to meet souls that are ardent, generous, humble, simple, very filial to Mary, very desirous of pleasing Jesus, that have everything it takes to arrive at mystical union with Him and with her, and could thus render their apostolic action a hundred times more fruitful, but who never arrive because they never tie themselves down to a truly interior life! It is not that their agitated life ever makes them commit positively serious faults. Perhaps in a sense, an accidental grave sin would do them less harm than this lack of interior self-possession. How many more mystical souls would there be in the world if there were more souls capable of understanding the importance of the interior life! And how many other souls would be saved and sanctified by them! They think that they have no time to recollect themselves. Was it not by retiring within herself, close to Jesus, that Teresa found the time to give herself to that apostolate of limitless extent?

Father Chaminade, who founded two religious Societies that were "essentially apostolic" and placed them under the leadership of the Queen of Apostles, began by telling his first disciples that "the essential is the interior."² "Now God who has chosen us among so many, has likewise given to us, children of Mary, the spirit that is proper to our calling, namely, the interior spirit."³ "Whom shall we choose as our patron and model in acquiring this interior spirit? It is the august Mother of God, whose life was spent for God alone, and who constantly carried God about with her, in perfect submission to His divine will. The spirit of the Institute is the spirit of Mary; therefore let us imitate Mary."⁴

He recommends this spirit to all, but especially to religious, women and men, who are overburdened with occupations. He repeats to them constantly, under one form or another: "The more business you have, the more you must remain master of yourself. . . . I have but to remark that you must preserve the spirit of retirement, of solitude, and of recollection amidst the affairs with which you are occupied."⁵

² S.F., I, par. 176.

³ S.F., I, par. 179.

⁴ S.F., I, par. 179.

⁵ S.F., I, par. 182.

For all, he leaves this energetic maxim: "A religious who is not spiritual (interior) is a chimera and a phantom."⁶*

How can we make sure of this interior spirit? First, by the suppression of the causes of exteriorization, that is, by watchfulness over the senses and by silence.

Father Chaminade taught his disciples his doctrine of the five silences, namely, the two exterior silences, silence of words and of signs; and the three interior silences, of the mind, the imagination, and the passions.

Then, and above all, we acquire the interior spirit, by attention to the life of God in the sanctuary of the soul. "The religious," Father Chaminade teaches again, "transforms his soul into a temple of the Lord; he there erects an altar, upon which he offers to God the sacrifice of his will; he never loses sight of the divine presence, but entertains himself sweetly and familiarly with God, who has established His resting place in him."⁷T

The mystery of the indwelling of God in us should ravish every loving soul; it deserves to be studied ceaselessly. We are saddened at the sight of a church in some paganized village where Jesus remains in His tabernacle for days and sometimes for weeks, without being visited by some faithful soul. But in these interior tabernacles, which are the souls of baptized persons in the state of grace, does He not remain months and even years without a visit, a remembrance, or even a loving word?

Nothing produces recollection so easily as the habit of thinking of God present in the soul and of speaking to Him and confiding our sentiments and all our needs to Him.⁸

Fourth condition: *Absolute confidence in Mary, and efforts toward constant intimacy with her.*

The dispositions just described are the ordinary conditions of preparation for the gift of mystical union with God. According to the experience of souls who have received the gift of the presence of Mary, a very special devotion to her is equally presupposed. All mystical souls have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin; but there

« S.F., I, par. 178.

’ S.F., I, par. 179.

⁸ There is perhaps no better school of the interior spirit than the writings of the young Carmelite of Dijon, Elizabeth of the Trinity, presented by Father Philippon, O.P., Editions of Seuil.

is question here of quite a special devotion, which distinguishes the soul as a Marian soul.

Two traits especially, it would seem, should be stressed in this devotion: confidence and continuous union.

We speak here not of great confidence — what interior soul does not have great confidence in its heavenly Mother? — but of an absolute confidence, which seems to be rather a gift than a conclusion deriving from reasons and facts. It is the certainty that with Mary all the difficulties encountered in spiritual or apostolic work will be vanquished.

There are Marian souls who seem to have been possessed of this confidence from their earliest years. Such was, for example, St. John Berchmans, who was sure that with Mary he would quickly reach sanctity. Such, perhaps also, was young Francis Possenti, the future St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother. After having led a rather worldly life for several years and after having resisted several calls of grace, Francis was finally conquered by a sorrowful look of Mary and decided to enter the order of the Passionists. His father, the governor of Spoleto, whose permission he requested, refused it, convinced that his son would not persevere. But Francis insisted, absolutely confident of his perseverance, because the Madonna would give him the grace. He died six years later and soon after was canonized.

This confidence came gradually to others, in the degree that their union with Jesus and Mary became intimate. Others again felt it after some reading or after a sermon or a Marian retreat. Once acquired and possessed, this confidence seem never to disappear.

The Marian soul, once it has understood that what Scripture says of Wisdom may also be said of Mary, "all goods come together with her,"⁸ will apply itself to a constant union with Mary, not only periodically, for one month or several months or during a whole year, but during practically a lifetime.

In the beginning, the soul will exercise itself in the acquisition of different virtues — often and instinctively it will be humility — all the while applying itself under the direction of Mary. But sooner or later it will come to the point of tending only toward a more and more intimate union with Mary, a union, such as has been explained in Part I, which consists not only in the frequent recalling of the

thought of her, but in identification with her in order to take on, like her and through her, all the dispositions of Jesus, in order to become Jesus, Son of God, made Son of Mary for the salvation of the world.

According to experience, it seems that the soul which applies itself faithfully to realizing these four conditions normally receives the gift of the presence of Mary. But when it will receive this gift cannot be foretold. That depends upon various factors, human and divine. Despite a real generosity, the soul may still seek itself unknowingly in certain of its tendencies. Its fidelity in referring impressions to Mary, especially after contact with others, its efforts at recollection, humility, and simplicity will hasten its purification and the mystical meeting with its heavenly Mother.

This does not mean that the meeting can take place only with the completion of the soul's purification. Our merciful Mother anticipates the desires of a child filled with good will; she will help him purify himself more completely by letting him feel her presence, by making this sentiment more frequent and more loving. Some Marian souls, before reaching mystical union, even before knowing that mystical union with Mary existed, have been favored with extraordinary graces. For example, there may be the sudden cessation of an impure temptation from the moment of total consecration to Mary. Or there may be absolute certainty, a kind of gift, that with Mary they shall triumph over all difficulties in their advance toward sanctity and in their apostolic career. Or there is a sudden call to the perfect life coming in a kind of interior word, such as at the end of a prayer to Mary, which she answers in a way opposite to the request, as happened to Mary of St. Teresa.

Does the Blessed Virgin always make such predictions to those whom she calls to a particularly intimate union with her? *A priori*, we do not see the necessity of it; *a posteriori*, although the fact is sufficiently frequent, we doubt that it is general.

CHAPTER FOUR

Birth and Growth of Mystical Union With Mary

In general, souls favored with the gift of the presence of Mary do not remember exactly the first manifestation of this grace; it grafts itself so naturally onto the grace of mystic union with our Lord. Here is the experience of one such soul:

You have asked me when I began to feel the supernatural action of Mary in me. I hesitate to give you a precise reply.

I recall vividly the first experience of God's action in my soul. I was praying one day in rather deep recollection when suddenly, in my interior, I experienced something that I had never felt before. "It is God that I feel," I said to myself. It lasted only an instant. Later, the phenomenon recurred and lasted longer, then became rather frequent, almost every time I was deeply recollected.

About mystical phenomena I knew only what I had read in the lives of saints, of their ecstasies, revelations, apparitions, levitations, etc., things that would never be for me, things which had no attraction for me. When I consulted *The Graces of Prayer* of Father Poulain, and later on my confessor, I wondered if my case was not the beginning of mystical union with God.

You know how for years I have felt attracted to live a life of union with Mary as closely as possible. I liked to read the biographies of servants of God who were particularly devout to the Blessed Virgin. A priest spoke to me one day of the *Journal Spirituel* of Lucy Christine. The experiences which the author had of mystical union with Mary coincided with what I felt for some time. Since when? I do not know. The fact that I felt God dwelling within me was quite new and altogether unexpected; it struck me at the first experience. On the contrary, I lived long in rather intimate, though ordinary, union with my heavenly Mother. The mystical union with Jesus must have made mystical union with Mary so natural that I paid no attention to it at first.

It was only after I saw it described that I recognized it also as my own. Anyway, that is how I explain its imperceptible approach.

In general, the growth of this union occurs also without arousing attention. It manifests itself above all, perhaps, in the relations of the soul with our Lord. The soul feels happy to be able, with Mary, to love Jesus with a greater intensity and purity than before. What a joy to be able to say, not after reasoning, but by direct experience: "O Jesus, it is no longer I that love Thee, it is Thy Mother who loves Thee in me." Since mystical union with Jesus always exists where there is mystical union with Mary, the Marian soul is conscious of loving Jesus with the heart of Mary, and of loving Mary with the heart of Jesus.

Mary thus becomes an extremely close and strong bond between the soul and Jesus. Lucy Christine was especially struck by this character of her union with Mary. After having mentioned union with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity, she wrote in her diary:

This year I have also been united sometimes with my most sweet Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. This union has the particular feature that the soul feels the Blessed Virgin as a bond of love between God and itself, as a divine means.¹

She returns often to this idea in her *Journal Spirituel*.² More than once she not only feels this function of the Blessed Virgin (ordinary mystical union), but she *sees* Mary (extraordinary phenomenon). For example, on the feast of the Assumption in 1907, she noted:

I saw in one of those wordless lights which fulfill and even surpass any desire—I saw this truth, that Jesus my love, my crucified and well-beloved Spouse, renews particularly for suffering souls the gift which, on the cross, He made to mankind of His august and tender Mother. She was between Him and my soul, and still we were only He and my soul. O mystery of unity, divine unity which draws all to itself without confusion of substances! Sacred threshold where the human mind stops, but where love sees and adores what it cannot understand!!!³

If the Marian soul endeavors, according to the recommendation of

¹ *Journal Spirituel de Lucie Christine*, published by A. Poulain, p. 29.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 96, 139, 201, 214, 381.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

Father Chaminade, "to be faithful to its grace, and to all of its grace," union with Mary increases continually in intensity and in extent. Acting always in the name of Mary, it feels her always acting in itself as if she dwelt in its interior. Of St. Louis Mary de Montfort, his friend M. Blain related:

He acknowledged to me that God favored him with a very particular grace, which was the continual presence of Jesus and Mary in the depth of his soul.

In one of his canticles the Saint declares:

Behold something hard to believe:
I bear it deep within me,
Impressed in traits of glory,
Although in darkness of faith.⁴

We find an even stronger expression in a number of Marian souls, that of their "identification" with Mary, or their "transformation" into her.

Marie Antoinette de Geuser, under the pseudonym, *Consummata*, speaks of this transformation repeatedly. On May 13, 1911, she writes to her uncle, a priest:

God has transformed me into Mary (I do not understand how that is possible, but only the word "transform" can express what has happened). I felt myself participant with Mary in so far as she is Queen of martyrs. . . . It seems that she wanted to call me "Mary of the Trinity," but that is only a detail.⁵

Two days later, to the same person she wrote:

Since Saturday I have written several letters, and each time in signing I have had the impression of signing a name which is not mine. . . . Instinctively, impelled by I do not know what, I was going to sign "Mary of the Trinity." No, M.A. is another person, someone dead . . . and my own name is Mary of the Trinity.⁶

The same experience is asserted, under different forms, by a great number of Marian souls. Of M. Olier it was said:

⁴ *Les Oeuvres du Bx Grignon de Montfort. Ses Cantiques*, by Rev. F. Fradet, S.M.M. Beauchesne, p. 67. See also what the Saint says on communication of the spirit of Mary to the soul, *Treatise*, No. 217.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

He seemed after that to be one with the most Blessed Virgin, who was more in him, so to say, than he himself. He saw himself established entirely anew in her, in a more complete participation of her grace, in her perfections, and her virtues, in her life, in a greater forgetfulness of self than ever before.⁷

In his correspondence he gave the recommendation:

Be faithful to losing yourself in her and you will be lost with her in Jesus Christ for time and for eternity.⁸

Father Schellhorn speaks of a fusion of the soul with the soul of Mary. One of his friends asked him one day how he understood the expression of St. Louis Mary de Montfort: to do all one's actions *in Mary*. He replied:

"In Mary" is a degree higher than "with Mary." It means that our soul fuses, so to speak, with that of the most Blessed Virgin and acts in full unison with her in all things.⁹

Mother Sorazu affirms that she possesses Mary in the depths of her heart and feels possessed by her.¹⁰

Brother Leonard writes in his spiritual notebook:

Every five minutes look at Mary. That means:

She: "Thou and I, we are one."

I: "Marie-Alphonse . . . !"

Alphonse was the baptismal name of Brother Leonard.¹¹

The Flemish solitary, Mary of St. Teresa, speaks at length of this union which in her case was extraordinary. She writes:

Sometimes he showed and gave me a life of the spirit in Mary, a repose in Mary, a pleasure, a fusion, a losing of self and a union with Mary.

Here is how it functions. In all simplicity, destitution, and tranquillity, the mind turns toward God and rests in its own being without images. Through pure adherence to contemplation of, and fruition in, that simple absolute Being, it happens that my soul experiences, besides

7 *L'Esprit de M. Olier*, by H. De Brctonvilliers-Tronson, L. IX.

8 *Lettres spirituelles*, by Olier, p. 250.

9 *Un Prêtre de Marie: le Père Joseph Schellhorn, Marianiste*, by E. Neubert, p. 159.

10 *Estudios Marianos*, 1951, vol. XI. p. 271.

11 *Op. cit.*, p. 315.

all that, an adherence to, a contemplation of, and a fruition in Mary, in so far as she is one with God and united to Him. Tasting God, I taste Mary also as if she were one with God and not distinct from Him; so much so that God and Mary seem to be only one object for the soul. It is almost like the holy humanity of Christ, which we contemplate united to the divinity, making of these two natures only one Person, one sole object of contemplation.¹²

Some time later she notices that she has progressed further in this union:

The supernatural life of the soul in Mary, for, with, and through Mary, continues and grows to a greater perfection and stability. What I experience here, what I try and taste is particularly admirable; and for my part, I have never heard or read anything like it.

It seems that the most lovable Mother is, so to speak, the life of my soul and, therefore, the soul of my soul. In a clear manner, which I can understand very well, she produces and brings forth the life of the soul in God, or the divine life, and that by a perceptible inflow of graces that are operative, preventive, strengthening, arousing, and soliciting; graces that accompany, follow, and continue, and which permit perseverance in that life in God with more strength, constancy, purity, etc.¹³

None of these Marian souls who speak of identification with the Blessed Virgin is the dupe of his imagination or conceives a sort of incarnation of Mary in himself. All are well aware that they remain individual persons distinct from Mary. But they testify to Mary's taking an interior possession of their activities. She transfuses into them her thoughts, her sentiments, her love, her will, her activity. Not that she suppresses their activity, but she takes it over, as it were, so that she can make it produce incomparably more perfect effects. According to the comparison of Mary of St. Theresa, Mary is the teacher directing the hand of the child who is writing. The child is not idle; he attempts to form letters; but the hand that guides him helps him to form perfect letters. The personal action is so insignificant beside the action of Mary that the soul attributes the whole result to her. In conclusion, Marian souls speak of their identification with the Mother of Jesus in the sense in which Paul speaks of his own with Christ, when he exclaims: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."¹⁴

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁴ Gal. 2:20.

Growth in this life of union with Mary depends evidently on the generosity of the Marian soul, and that generosity consists above all in making all the sacrifices and efforts required to lead a life as deeply interior as possible. That interior life will in its turn strengthen generosity, for in contact with Jesus and Mary, what sacrifice could we refuse?

From time to time, as often as possible, we should renew ourselves in this loving contact. The name of "Mary," or its equivalent, "Mother," will be a powerful help. Naturally it will be accompanied by a quick glance toward the Blessed Virgin, so that we may live under her watchful eye.

We have already discussed the repetition of the names of Jesus and Mary in Chapter Three of the first part. But in the mystic union with Jesus and Mary, this practice is greatly perfected. A person does not merely recall; he *feels* that he is Jesus saying "Mary!"; that he is Mary saying "Jesus!" This intimate experience puts much more love and efficacy into it.

Here are some lines from Mary of St. Theresa on the devotion to the holy name of Mary:

In His goodness, God grants me the grace also of gently breathing in Mary, of living in her, of experiencing an exceptional sweetness in hearing or pronouncing this infinitely sweet name, and even in merely thinking of it, to such a point that my soul and my heart seem to melt out of tenderness and with intimate relish. Hence, not being able to satiate myself by simply repeating this name, with my lips or heart or mind, I experience a tremendous spiritual pleasure, contentment, and joy, and such a leaping of the heart, that each time a new flame seems to burst from my soul.¹⁵

In Chapter Seven, Communion With the Soul of Mary, we discussed the use of "Marian Communions" or "Aspirations" so dear to Sister Angela Sorazu and her director, Father Perez, as well as to Father Poppe. These three authors were favored with a mystical union with Mary. Even though this practice is possible to every Marian soul, it is understandably far sweeter and more efficacious in souls who not only *believe* in a closer intimacy with Mary but *are conscious* of Mary's having possessed them, of her bestowing a share in her own

¹⁵ *Op. at.*, p. 54.

confidence, in her humility, in her love of Jesus, in her filial piety toward the Father, and in her intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

These Marian aspirations, made from time to time, during free moments, allow the soul to give itself to Mary again and again, and to beg her to come and possess it entirely and to substitute her own life, all pure and loving, for the egotistic life of her poor child. We can renew this aspiration more quickly in the course of our actions by saying simply: "Mary!"

Up to a certain point in their intimacy with their heavenly Mother, Marian souls sense the need of multiplying these aspirations. They would like to love Jesus so much but, feeling their poverty and their coldness, they call upon Mary in order to love the Son with the heart of His Mother.

By these various practices the soul gradually comes to feel that it is almost constantly loved and directed by Mary, that it is transformed into her, that it realizes the wish of St. John Eudes.

Live the life of this blessed Heart, have her sentiments in you, enter into her dispositions, follow her inclinations, love what she loves, hate what she hates and nothing else. Desire only what she desires, rejoice only in what she rejoices, fear only what she would fear if she were still subject to fear. Be not saddened except by what would sadden her if she were still capable of sadness. Work for the accomplishment of her designs. Give yourself ceaselessly to the spirit which animates her so that this same spirit may possess you and lead you in all things. May her grace sanctify you, may her charity inflame you, may her love consume you, and, above all, may her zeal for the salvation of souls devour you.¹⁸

le Op. cit., p. 75.

CHAPTER FIVE

General Effects of Mystical Union With Mary in the Spiritual Life

THE knowledge a person has of the union of Mary's action with his own must have repercussions on his whole spiritual life. In this chapter we note merely its ordinary effects; we reserve for future chapters the study of this union in particular situations.

First, in supernatural activity in general, the soul favored with this gift of union does spiritual things with more facility, purity, joy, confidence, and perfection.

Recall the confidence of Sister Colette, the Poor Clare of Besançon, feeling the little flame of her love become a blazing furnace after her union with Mary. Undoubtedly the effects are not so striking in all the activities of the mystic soul. They depend, in large part, on the recollection, generosity, humility, and love which the soul practices. In any case, even in periods of aridity, the soul feels that it has succeeded in pleasing Jesus and Mary, and that is a great consolation.

In Chapter Six of Part I we considered the presence of Mary according to the data of faith. The soul addresses the Blessed Virgin as if she were at its side or in front of it. There is question then of a presence of Mary exterior to the soul.

The gift of the presence of Mary supposes the awareness of an interior presence of Mary, not as if she resided in the soul as God resides there, but in so far as she makes the soul feel her action united with its own in order to purify and intensify that action.

Is there also a gift of the exterior presence of Mary?

In the writings of several servants of Mary we find expressions which seem to suppose it.

St. Louis Mary de Montfort, explaining the expression *acting in*

Mary, calls the Blessed Virgin the true terrestrial paradise, the sanctuary of God, the city, the oratory, the temple of God; that is, he seems to consider the Blessed Virgin as an environment where the soul feels constantly under her influence.¹

He speaks also of the "interior" of Mary, of "the womb of Mary in which the soul is nourished by her grace."² The expression "in the womb of Mary" is found very frequently in the writings and exhortations of Father Chaminade and even in the Constitutions which he wrote for his disciples: the Society of Mary "intends, through Mary, to raise each of its members as Jesus Christ was raised through her care, after having been formed in her virginal womb."³ By this expression he designates the maternal influence of Mary on the religious in order to make of him another Jesus.

In the notes of Father Jacquier we often find the same expression, "the womb of Mary," and still more often "the Heart of Mary." According to the explanations of two confrères of Father Jacquier, Fathers Doury and Mura, those two expressions of Father Jacquier blend with and complete each other. The "womb" of Mary characterizes the vital function of the Blessed Virgin in the spiritual life, that of giving life, of being the "environment," the "atmosphere" in which God communicates His life of grace.⁴ The "vivifying efficacy of Mary, all her action in our sanctification, proceeds from her love, is the fruit of her Heart."⁵

Today, especially since the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by Pius XII, Marian souls speak instinctively of living, of reposing, of losing themselves in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, without wishing to designate anything else by the Heart of Mary than the loving, motherly influence with which Mary envelops them.

In his commentary on *True Devotion*, Father Poppe endeavors to define the maternal role of Mary. "She keeps us in the spiritual atmosphere of grace ... A luminous cloud under which we can dwell and take shelter."⁶

¹ *Treatise*, No. 261 ff.; *Secret*, No. 47.

² *Treatise*, No. 264.

³ See S.F., I, par. 115; Const, art. 4.

⁴ *Vie et doctrine mariale du R. P. Jacquier*, by R. Doury, p. 158.

⁵ *La Vie Mariale, "les Carnets Noirs" du R. P. G. Jacquier*, p. 12.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

A person might wonder if, in this way of living *in* Mary, in the *womb* of Mary, in the *Heart* of Mary, there is properly an element of mysticism. Can it not be attained by constant application? Theoretically, yes, because it seems to be the result of an acquired habit. Therefore St. Louis Mary de Montfort indicates means to reach this state.⁷ But practically, one does not succeed in living *habitually* in Mary except by a special grace of the Holy Spirit—which St. Louis Mary de Montfort also teaches.⁸

Mystical experience of the action of Mary in the soul produces a habit of loving intimacy with her. This habit prompts us to address Mary in every action and emotion and to live constantly under her eye. Interior mystical experience is *not the direct cause* of this habit of living in her presence, under her regard, but it helps, it *arouses* the soul to address itself to her as being very near.

There are cases of mystical awareness of the exterior presence of Mary. But these are extraordinary mystical phenomena. Sometimes—most often, no doubt—these are exceptional facts in the life of a soul which enjoys ordinarily the gift of the interior presence of Mary.

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus relates one of these instances which occurred at the beginning of her Carmelite life:

For me there was a kind of veil cast over all the things of earth. . . . I felt entirely hidden under the veil of the Blessed Virgin. At that time I was in charge of the refectory and I remember that I was doing things as if I were not doing them; it was as if I acted with a borrowed body. I remained like that an entire week. It was a supernatural state very difficult to explain. God alone can place us in such a state, and it is enough sometimes to detach the soul forever from the earth.⁹

Consider another instance in which this exceptional grace was accorded to a soul in order to prepare it for a particularly terrible trial. It is the experience of Sister Mary Queen of Jesus, Daughter of Mary Immaculate, deceased in 1938, whom our Lord asked to offer herself as victim for France (at the time of the “Popular Front”). There was a lull in the midst of her torments of both soul and body; but these torments were to be followed by the last and most anguishing of her trials. She wrote to her spiritual director:

In your last letter you said I should live as closely united to Mary

⁷ *Secret*, No. 47.

⁸ *Treatise*, No. 263.

⁹ *Novissima Verba*, p. 63.

as possible, so as to put as much love as possible into my life of victim. Today I may say that I hardly ever leave my mother; she does everything. She has pity on the weakness of her child.

Since the third, the anniversary of my perpetual profession, it seems to me that I have come out of a bad dream. I offered myself again, fully, despite the anguishes, the fear—and lol Jesus replied in a way that I did not expect. It has been a long time since I felt any peace, any calm, and, I should add, any joy like this. I cannot say that I live by faith, for I think I am with them as much as one can be here below. My body is only a covering . . . which hides them from me; that is all. I cannot explain myself well, Father, but you understand, I am sure.

Really, should Jesus be so good to me? After having been so cowardly, after having refused my cross, that I should now be so overwhelmed with favors!

I know well that this state will not endure; without doubt Jesus reserves some more painful trial for me, and He wants to give me the strength. Fiat in everything!

There are souls who constantly enjoy this gift of the exterior presence of Mary. They are souls who are favored with all kinds of extraordinary mystical graces.

Mary of St. Theresa often speaks of this presence of Mary, which takes on different modes.¹⁰

Mary of the Incarnation, after the fire which destroyed the first monastery of the Ursulines in Quebec, began to build a new monastery which she confided to the Blessed Virgin. She writes:

In this enterprise I regarded her as my directress and my all before God. I had hardly begun when I experienced her assistance in an extraordinary way. I felt her presence continually, everywhere I went, and in all that I did. I did not see her with bodily eyes, but in the manner in which the ever adorable Incarnate Word does me the honor of communicating with me, by union, by love, and by actual communication. . . . I felt her near me; she accompanied me everywhere in the necessary coming and going in the building, from the day they began knocking down the partitions until the end of construction. In going to and fro I kept in touch with her and I said, "Let us go, my dear mother, and see our workers." And, as occasion demanded, I

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 37, 38, 53, 68, etc.

went up and down on the scaffolding, without any fear, talking to her in that manner.¹¹

Here is another case, in which I was able to ask for explanations directly from the favored person. She was a nun, deceased in 1942; she had been the object of extraordinary graces from childhood. I was often called to perform the ministry in her convent. She confided to me the fact that she constantly had the sense of the presence of the Blessed Virgin.

One day we were exchanging views on a question of practical psychology, when suddenly I recalled what she had confided to me. I said: "Let's see, Sister Imelda; during our discussion, were you thinking of the Blessed Virgin?" She replied: "Suppose Mother Prioress had been in this room while we were talking and discussing, I would have had the sense of her presence. It is something like that with the Blessed Virgin."

As we said, such cases belong to extraordinary mystical union, which we may admire without desire.

The practice of *consulting with the Blessed Virgin* has been described in Chapter Ten of Part I. It is known to most souls favored with the gift of the presence of Mary without their having found it described in any book. It corresponds to a need, that of living their total donation to Mary. On the part of these souls, consultation with Mary is not only more frequent than in ordinary union, but is also more perfect. They seek less to know what they have to do and how they should do it than to know how *to be Mary*, causing the maximum pleasure to Jesus. It comes to the same, after all, but one thinks less of self and more of Jesus and Mary.

Such consultation with Mary is also more rapid in consequence of this gift of union. Generally it is reduced to pronouncing the names: "Mary! Jesus!" "Mary!" that is to say: May I be you in His eyes! "Jesus!" that is to say: Mary and I, we wish to cause You the greatest pleasure possible. In their presence, the soul feels quickly how it should realize this program, for it surmises easily how, through it, Mary would want to cause pleasure to her Son. That would be the soul's attitude before an action. And during the action the invocation "Mary!" would suffice to maintain or to restore that attitude.

¹¹ *Histoire de la Vénérable Mère Marie de l'incarnation*, by Rev. Léon Chapot, t. II, pp. 138-139.

Such consultation is almost infallible; not in theory, but in practice, because one knows truly what pleases Jesus most, and what pleases Mary because of Him.

Of course, this consultation takes place in recollection and love.

In the preceding chapters a number of examples have been given. We shall cite three others here.

The first is from St. Teresa of the Child Jesus. It is her own avowal, her "secret" in difficulties:

I have recourse to prayer. I cast an interior glance toward the Blessed Virgin, and Jesus always triumphs.¹²

Here is the testimony of a religious who, as a girl, already loved to have recourse to Mary:

I consult her in all that I do. She does not respond by word, but with the assurance that this or that is her answer.

The following statement is from a nun plunged for a long time in obscurity and temptation until the moment of her total consecration to Mary:

I feel that it is Mary who makes me act. I consult her before an act and sense what she wants. It is not a revelation, but the certainty that she wants a particular thing. Besides, success always follows such consultation.

Above, we observed that the Marian soul is naturally prompted to take Mary for spiritual directress. In mystical union, this direction would of course be more constant and more perfect. First, because consultation with Mary produces more certain responses. Secondly, because the sense of the presence of Mary permits the soul to recognize her will more easily. Thirdly, because of the grace of enlightenment which the soul's humility and confidence obtain.

Sometimes the directions of Mary are unexpected. They are not revelations and yet they seem to be the undeniable expression of Mary's will. In case of doubt they should be submitted to a spiritual director.

Here are some such experiences.

Of Father Vayssière, Provincial of the Dominicans at Toulouse, deceased in 1940, Father M. I. Nicolas, O.P., relates:

¹² *Historié d'une Ame*, Chap. X.

Mary was the universal means, the very atmosphere of his spiritual life. This state of detachment and of pure union with God alone, in which he lived, had been established in him by the Blessed Virgin, who maintained him in it and who so willed it. "It is the Blessed Virgin who has done everything," he often said. "I owe her everything."¹³

These words are from a nun, a teacher of problem children:

I always consult Mary. Generally I have the sense of her presence during my occupations. She warns me if I have been too severe.

From a Catholic mother:

The Blessed Virgin is constantly with me. I feel her close to me, before me. She directs me in everything. I undertake nothing without consulting her. She replies by a yes or no, sometimes otherwise than I expected. Sometimes, without my consulting her, she gives me such and such an inspiration. All that I undertake with her succeeds. Sometimes my sister-in-law tells me: "You don't know how to make up your mind." True, I do not decide on the spur of the moment, for first I wish to consult the Blessed Virgin; after that, I make up my mind and I find the proper solution.

With the Blessed Virgin, everything takes place to my heart's content. She is tremendous, really tremendous; I cannot find another word for it.

Here is one more testimony from a Marian soul favored with extraordinary graces, St. Margaret Mary. Afflicted with a mysterious illness for three years, at the age of thirteen, upon her mother's suggestion, she made the vow to consecrate herself to the Blessed Virgin. She writes:

I had no sooner made the vow than I received both the cure and a new protection of the Blessed Virgin, who made herself such a mistress of my soul that, considering me her own, she governed me as one dedicated to her, reproving my faults and teaching me to do the will of God.¹⁴

No one will be astonished to hear that the Christocentric and Marian meditation described in the first part of this book becomes

¹³ *La Vie spirituelle*, April, 1941, p. 278 ff. Cited in *La Mère du Sauveur et notre vie intérieure*, by R. Garrigou-Lagrange, p. 333.

¹⁴ *Op. vit.*, T. I, 31 f.

easier and more perfect for the soul aware of the action of Mary within it.

Meditation becomes gradually a simple and loving contemplation. The soul is happy to love and to know that it is loved, and readily lingers in this sentiment in which it finds such joy and strength.

Meditation also becomes more fruitful. Penetrating into the heart of Jesus to study and reproduce his dispositions, not only *with* Mary, but *being* Mary, the soul identifies itself more completely with our Lord.

The same may be said of the soul's relations with the three divine Persons; for gradually it feels itself drawn to the most Holy Trinity. The soul becomes more loving and confident. The dispositions of Mary toward the Father, her Father, to the Son, her Son, and to the Holy Ghost, her Spouse, become the dispositions of her child into whom she transfuses her spirit.

A few experiences will help us understand the mental prayer of these Marian souls.

From Father Jacquier:

In mental prayer, I will let myself be hypnotized by Jesus and by Mary, in the abandonment of love. Often, I am seized by my good Mother and the hours pass so sweetly, as if I were a little babe on the breasts of my mother. The most Blessed Virgin overwhelms me. Oh, what riches!¹⁵

From a nun in an active order:

In a few hours I am going to close my annual retreat. I made it in the Cenacle, in the company of our Lady and the Twelve, in the expectancy of the Holy Spirit. Was it not an ideal moment for me to make the retreat? And in what blessed company! My soul passed through many states during that time, but peace was the constant note. Twice I tasted the joys of Thabor. Once I shared the agony with my well-beloved Spouse. But most of the time I passed in the serene dwelling of the Immaculate Heart, passive, under the divine action, in pure faith. . . .

Resolution: to continue to live in the Immaculate Heart of my divine Mother, my dear Solitude. More than ever I feel attracted toward that maternal Heart. . . . In prayer, that Heart will be my oratory. I will love Jesus with her Heart. I will adore Him, praise Him with her

¹⁵ *La Vie Mariale*, p. 17.

Heart. At the hour of suffering and of sacrifice, her Heart will be the altar upon which I will immolate myself for the glory of the most Holy Trinity. In work, this Heart will be my light, to accomplish the will of the Father. With her I will say my "Ecce ancilla Domini!"¹⁶

Vocal prayers also become transformed. The soul feels Mary who loves, praises, adores, and petitions Jesus and the Father and the Spirit. It feels Jesus who loves and venerates His mother.

Relations with *Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament* above all become more intimate and more loving, according to the experience of Sister Colette. *The Holy Sacrifice* is Jesus immolating Himself before Mary and in union with Mary for the glory of the Father, for the sanctification of His mother, and for the salvation of the world.

There is similar progress in *the acquisition of virtues*.

In the first part we saw that Christian virtues are merely the dispositions of Jesus to be reproduced in ourselves. And the means of knowing these dispositions and of making them ours is, above all, Christocentric and Marian mental prayer. With Mary the soul penetrates into the interior of Jesus; it contemplates these virtues through the eyes of Mary; it loves them with the Heart of Mary; in imitating Mary it endeavors to reproduce them. Now, we have seen how in mystical mental prayer, "penetrating into the Heart of Jesus to study and to reproduce these dispositions, not only *with* Mary, but *being* Mary, the soul identifies itself more completely with Him" than by the simple effect of a phenomenon of psychological sympathy.

The Marian soul understands and practices better the fundamental disposition of all spiritual work, *renouncement*. Desirous of loving Jesus and Mary with all the powers of its being, it recognizes that the great enemy of that love is the love of one's ego. If "the ego is always detestable" to others, in the Marian soul it is above all detestable to itself.

Here are some interior words, not articulated, that Mary addressed to a consecrated soul:

A life of intimacy with me does not consist only in remaining at my knees, and making acts of love. If you love me, prove it by forgetting

¹⁶ Extraordinary mystical mental prayer is marked by ecstasies, revelations, visions. Mary of St. Theresa speaks of contemplation of God and of Mary as a single object. See *op. at.*, pp. 63 f., 77 f., and the commentary of Michael of St. Augustine, *op. at.*, Chapters VII, VIII, and IX.

yourself and by renouncing yourself constantly. On every occasion choose what will mortify you most and what is least agreeable to nature. You know what I desire of you; make these little sacrifices for me and in a short time I shall make a saint of you.

Abandon your soul and your body to me entirely and leave to me the care of giving you at each instant what my maternal kindness has prepared for you. The principal thing that I desire of you, my dear child, is that you leave me free to act in you and that you refuse me no sacrifice. Intimate union with my divine Son is at this price.

The Marian soul understands and practices best the disposition which constitutes the summit of the spiritual life, namely, *love*; for Jesus and Mary are love. In being Jesus the soul loves Mary, and in being Mary it loves Jesus, and in Jesus, all men. It understands and practices best all the other virtues. Among them, we should perhaps mention in particular purity and humility.

Purity is the characteristic virtue of Mary. It has given her her second name; she is called Virgin just as often as Mary. Mary is all pure, miraculously pure in her conception, and even more so in her motherhood. Her purity is beauty, brightness, strength, pacifying power. All pure, she is all beautiful, made to delight the eye of God as well as that of men.

It is a fact that, if all the children of Mary who invoke their Mother in temptation receive from her the grace to remain pure, those who live with her in mystical intimacy frequently receive a participation in her miraculous purity. Some of her children have never felt the sting of any impure temptation. Such was the case of St. Teresa of Avila, of St. Teresa of Lisieux, of Mother Angela Sorazu. St. John Berchmans confessed shortly before his death that he never felt any solicitation to impure sin, and attributed that grace to the special protection of Mary. The breviary speaks of a similar preservation of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

There are others who passed through periods of more or less violent temptation; after their total consecration to Mary, they were suddenly delivered from them.

A nun favored with the gift of the presence of Mary, wrote:

Some years after my profession, I passed through terrible trials. There was night in my spirit. There were especially the assaults of impure temptations. I always resisted, but they came back stronger and more

overwhelming. I would pray, but they were always there, and I was convinced of my eternal damnation.

I was given the biography of a nun who was at first lukewarm but then converted as a result of her total consecration to Mary according to the doctrine of Blessed Grignon de Montfort. This kind of devotion repelled me. Several times, I put the book aside but, despite myself, took it up again. At last I made my total consecration to the Blessed Virgin, and believe me, immediately all my temptations to impurity and to despair vanished and gave place to peace, to confidence, and to heavenly joy.

Another religious wrote:

From the age of six or seven years, I had to struggle against impure temptations. When I went to Holy Communion more frequently I became stronger against them, but they returned very often. However, from the day on which I made the vow of total belonging to Mary, they stopped suddenly. At first I paid no attention to the fact, for I received no indication that I had been the object of a special favor. But after some days I was astonished that I was no longer tempted.

More than twenty years have passed since that time and I have never been molested. This favor preceded by about five years the sense of Mary's action in my soul.

Sometimes, souls thus delivered from the solicitations of concupiscence have to pass again, for short periods, through the trial of temptations. But these are generally less strong than formerly and are easily overcome by recourse to Mary. A consecrated soul writes:

In general, I am no longer tempted, except on the occasions mentioned above. As soon as I notice a temptation I immediately seek refuge in the Heart of my Immaculate Mother. The tempter has no access to that blessed abode. My little stratagem succeeds marvelously; hence I use it every time.

Is this grace of participation in the miraculous purity of Mary common to souls who have reached mystic union with their Mother? I would not be able to vouch for it. *A priori* there does not seem to be a necessary relationship between the two favors. Still, it seems to be frequent.

Mystical union with Mary engenders *humility* just as naturally as it engenders purity. *Child of Mary* and *proud* are terms that

mutually exclude each other. But if pride, which despises men and wishes to do without God, is incompatible with true devotion to Mary, vanity, on the other hand, which wishes to attract attention to itself and is complacent in what one is or what one does, can coexist with a certain devotion to Mary. Once arrived at mystic union, the soul feels the need of a war unto death against all vanity and self-complacency, in order to respond to the designs of Jesus and Mary. In union with Mary the soul finds the means to come forth victorious from this warfare. Direct contact with Jesus and Mary increases love for them and, consequently, engenders hatred for all that could oppose the perfection of love. Actually, a life of intimacy with Mary makes a person understand the absurdity of all vanity and self-complacency.

Mary of St. Theresa writes :

Life in Mary continues in me, and through her, in God. As in the past this life is all humility, submission, obedience, and I remain like a child under the direction and authority of my most loving mother.¹⁷

Temptations to vanity and self-complacency endeavor to insinuate themselves into the soul because of the very perfection to which it aspires. But the soul discovers them easily by telling Mary all its emotions, of joy or of discontent, and it sees their inanity without trouble. The words of the Blessed Virgin are most apropos: "He has done great things for me, because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid."

Some experiences.

Of a Mother Superior:

I begin to realize my influence, or rather the influence of Our Lady on the souls with whom I am in contact, especially the souls confided to my care. So often, particularly of late, our Sisters tell me how much my letters have helped them; or perhaps it was an interview with me! That causes no vanity or pride, because I know it is the influence of my Immaculate Mother that is exercised through me as intermediary.

The experience of a priest:

When I succeed, I simply say to Mary: "Thanks! Pardon! Thanks for

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

the good that you have performed through me; pardon for not allowing you to do all the good that you wanted to do."

In constant contact with Mary who was so happy to chant of her lowliness in order to glorify God, the Marian soul experiences a genuine happiness in admitting its misery and its shortcomings. The practice suggested above of "going to Jesus with one's Mother, one's misery, one's confidence"¹⁸ makes the soul not only recollected, but happy because it is able to make Jesus happy.

Here is the statement of a lay person:

I feel happy to offer my sins to Mary that she may offer them to our Lord. When I recite the Confiteor or make an act of contrition, I am glad to offer my miseries to God through Mary. Confession always brings me great happiness.

Slightly modifying the phrase of St. Paul which St. Augustine completed, a person might say: For those who live in the intimacy of Mary, everything turns to their advantage, even sin.

The ideas expressed on the *apostolate* and ordinary union with Mary apply evidently also to mystic union. Naturally one expects experimental contact with the Blessed Virgin to give greater efficacy to the Marian apostolate. In fact, one sees persons deprived of means considered indispensable to anyone desiring ascendancy over others, such as eloquence, ability, fortune, the protection of influential men, but because they are living in that supernatural union with Mary, they exercise a vast and profound apostolic action, quite puzzling to those who are ignorant of their secret.

Above we learned how St. Teresa explained her "secret" to the novices who believed that she read their consciences. She said it consisted in consulting Mary before giving them an answer. The novices of Father Schellhorn also wondered if their novice master had not the gift of reading their souls. His "secret" was the same as that of the Saint of Lisieux. "The lucidity of his mind in questions that were put to him made a great impression. After a moment of recollection, the response came clearly, decisively, full of natural and supernatural wisdom, given with such an assurance as to make every doubt or hesitation impossible. A person felt sure that the Blessed Mother had spoken through him and would submit as if she herself had spoken."¹⁰

Such souls advance with entire confidence. How could they fail? They know they are doing the will of God and that Mary acts with them and through them. Hence, in the midst of contradiction or even of apparent failure, they preserve an unvarying peace with the certitude of final success.

A layman engaged in a delicate apostolate writes:

When I speak, it is as if Mary is behind me and speaks through me. They make objections to me; sometimes they fall upon me like atomic bombs. I listen to them, remaining united to Mary because I work in her name. I do not suffer from these contradictions; I accept whatever Jesus wants, and try to be only one with Mary; this makes me happy even in the midst of contradictions. Finally Mary triumphs; they let themselves be convinced and soon start to help me.

Naturally these apostles endeavor to fructify their apostolate by prayer. Since they pray for the realization of Mary's intentions in their apostolic action, and since they are conscious that she is praying with them, their prayer possesses unfailing efficacy.

They know also the need of suffering for the success of every supernatural action. For that matter, their very apostolate often produces trials of all kinds. They unite these sufferings to those of Jesus and Mary with the assurance of greater fecundity in their apostolic action.

CHAPTER SIX

Mystical Union With Mary and Trials

Whoever has practiced the doctrine of the *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary* according to St. Louis Mary de Montfort will have been struck by the affirmations of the saint on the marvelous advantages of the devotion which he preaches: this devotion is “the easiest, the shortest, the most perfect, and the surest way of arriving at union with our Lord, in which Christian perfection consists.”¹

The first of these advantages will, above all, provoke astonishment:

It is an easy way. It is the way which Jesus Christ Himself trod in coming to us, and in which there is no obstacle to reaching Him. It is true that we can attain divine union by other roads; but it is by many more crosses and strange deaths, and with many more difficulties, which we shall find hard to overcome. We must pass through obscure nights, through combats, through strange agonies, over craggy mountains, through cruel thorns and over frightful deserts. But on the path of Mary we pass more gently and more tranquilly.

We do find, it is true, great battles to fight, and great hardships to master; but that good Mother makes herself so present and so near to her faithful servants, as to enlighten them in their darknesses and their doubts, to strengthen them in their fears, and to sustain them in their struggles and their difficulties, so that in truth this virginal path to Jesus Christ is a path of roses and honey compared with the others. . . .²

It is quite true that since the most faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin are also her greatest favorites, they receive from her the greatest graces and favors of heaven, which are crosses. But I maintain that it is also the servants of Mary who carry these crosses with more ease, more merit, and more glory. That which would stay the progress of another a thousand times over, or perhaps would make him fall, does

¹ *Op. cit.*, No. 152.

² *Ibid.*

not once stop their steps, but rather enables them to advance, because that good Mother, full of grace and the unction of the Holy Spirit, prepares her servants' crosses with so much maternal sweetness and pure love as to make them gladly acceptable.³

By "obscure nights" through which one must pass, the saint evidently means the trials of the mystic life about which St. John of the Cross writes. He seems to suppose either that these nights do not exist for the soul closely united to Mary, or at least that they are much less distressing than those through which other souls have to pass on their way to perfection.

Before examining the question directly, it might be well to distinguish between trials that are properly purifications of the soul, which permit it to advance further in union with God, and trials that have another purpose. There is no reason to consider as a purification every trial to which a faithful soul is submitted, nor to suppose consequently that such a soul has not yet arrived at familiar union with our Lord or the most Holy Trinity. Suffering may be a proof of love and a means of advancing further; it may be a reparation offered to God for the sins of others; it may be for the consolidation of a supernatural work. Hence we often see men of God visited by particularly terrible trials at the end of their apostolic life. "Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit."⁴ Was it in view of a personal purification that Christ willed to undergo His Passion, and the Blessed Virgin her Compassion?

Let us examine first of all the "purification trials." Is the statement of St. Louis Mary de Montfort founded? According to experience, it is. There are souls who apparently have arrived at a life of transformation into Jesus without having had to pass through the trials described by St. John of the Cross and other mystics.

Purification of the soul conceived in original sin is necessary if it is to be transformed into Jesus. But these trials are not the only means of being purified. To achieve this purification two things are necessary: first, to be well aware of every attachment to created things and to oneself, and second, to have the courage to break these attachments, no matter what the cost. The habit whereby Marian souls

³ *Ibid.*, No. 154.

⁴ Jn. 12:24.

communicate to their mother all their emotions, especially joys and dissatisfactions in their relations with others, makes them easily aware of all that smacks of self-seeking. And at Mary's side they naturally have the will and the strength to break with all attachments which prevent them from belonging, like her, entirely to Jesus.'

Father Jacquier insists especially on the last point; he said about St. John of the Cross: "He is my preferred author; I am reading his works for the eighth time." But he explains:

We must apply the principles of St. John of the Cross to the Marian life; our Mother will be there to facilitate the task and to sustain our weakness. . . .

The life of Mary puts us in the state of purification. . . .

One must place in his heart the disposition of refusing nothing. Living moment for moment, one applies his whole being to the present action with a view to pleasing our Father and our Mother in heaven.®

Some Marian souls may not make enough effort to live in the recollection indispensable for constant union with Mary. Then aridity, obscurity, or temptations come to shake them and to make them examine themselves. But such trials need not last long; these troubled souls turn instinctively toward their heavenly Mother, who reveals their secret self-seeking, spurs them on, and helps them to renouncement in order to seek only Jesus.

Some examples. First, the case of two souls who passed through very difficult trials. Here the exception only proves the rule, for these trials preceded their union with Mary and ceased after that union.

The first case is that of the nun already cited who was subject to terrible temptations against purity and who believed herself sure of damnation until she made her total consecration to Mary. She says:

5 Persons engaged in the active life, either in the convent or in the world, have more occasions for noticing their attachments and hence of combating effectively every act of self-seeking, than those who lead a contemplative life, although these latter are also tried severely in their relations with their companions. But besides rubbing elbows with those who live close to them, active persons have business interests to administer, enterprises to plan and to lead to success, as well as reverses to suffer — all of which can agitate the soul oftener and more deeply, and so cause secret tendencies to appear. For this reason long periods of dryness, obscurity, and temptation are encountered more frequently in monasteries of cloistered nuns than elsewhere, since they seem more necessary there for the detachment of the soul from every movement of secret self-seeking.

e La Vie Mariale, p. 17.

From that day I suffered practically no temptations, but if one presented itself, I had only to have recourse to Mary to be delivered from it.

The other case is that of the Flemish solitary, Mary of St. Theresa, whose life was an uninterrupted series of Marian favors. Her biographer tells us:

When this union with the Blessed Virgin manifested itself in the soul of Mary of St. Theresa, she had already passed through difficult passive purifications. At the moment when these Marian interventions became precise and almost habitual, the solitary had just passed through a long night of the spirit and her abandoned soul was deprived of all light. Introduced at that time to Marian contemplation, Mary of St. Theresa was aware of passing to a more eminent degree of mystic life.'

Other souls favored by the gift of the presence of Mary did not have to pass through mystical trials properly so called. Here is the case of a person living in the world. She confided to her spiritual guide:

I am astonished not to have had any great dryness yet. Maybe it will come. I once feared such dryness, but at present, I have less fear because I see it could serve to cause pleasure to Jesus and to Mary. Then, no matter what I experience, at the bottom of my heart I have always the joy of causing joy to Jesus and to Mary.

Other Marian souls pass through trials, which are generally brief and always sweetened by the thought of Mary.

A nun declares:

I passed through periods of aridity that were very painful. But I was never in uncertainty; the Blessed Virgin always guided me.

A religious testifies:

I do not experience pleasure in mental prayer. I remain dry before our Lord. So the Blessed Virgin doesn't do me any good? O yes! I unite myself to her, and then despite my lack of love, I am certain to cause pleasure to our Lord.

Venerable Louis Mary de Beaudoin, who ordinarily "did not leave the Heart of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus," had to pass through

an extremely painful period during which he complained of "the indifference and the coldness of the loving Mary." He had made a vow to endure sufferings for the glory of the Trinity,⁸ and he was taken at his word. But here, too, the trial was only transitory and it seems to have been rather a love trial than a purification trial.

We have already spoken of temptations against purity. There are others, for example, to infidelity.

Marie Duchet, the future Sister Colette of the Poor Clares of Besançon, had tried religious life three times and three times returned to her disconcerted parents. Yet she felt that God called her to a life of perfection. She was readmitted to the novitiate a fourth time and once again her temptations to infidelity took hold of her and tortured her for four months. One day, at the end of her endurance, she went to cast herself at the feet of the statue of Mary begging her Blessed Mother to obtain the grace of perseverance for her. "From that moment," she said, "I was completely changed."⁹

The biographer of the Curé of Ars writes:

While he celebrated Mass, sentiments of desire, hope, and love crowded his soul and, strange to say, were mixed with sentiments of fear and temptations to despair. One morning the thought of hell harassed him so much with the apprehension of losing God forever that he sighed interiorly: "At least, let me have the Blessed Virgin."¹⁰

Mother Angela Sorazu passed through that trial and describes it in detail. It seemed to her that Jesus was irritated with her and did not love her any more. She then begged Mary to place herself in front of her so that Jesus would see her through His mother. Those were the only moments, she confessed, in which He showed her any friendliness. One day when she was in choir with her Sisters, she felt herself oppressed by the devil, convinced that he was her master and would be her master throughout eternity. Then in the martyrology she heard the Sisters recite the name of Mary. She notes:

At the very instant that the name of Mary struck my ears the presence of the Blessed Virgin thrust itself upon my soul in a wonderful way. To hear the name of Mary, to feel her come to my soul,

⁸ *L'enseignement spirituel du Vénérable Louis Marie Beaudoin, d'après sa vie et ses écrits*, by J. Robin, F.M.I., pp. 157, 163.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, Introduction and Chapter I.

¹⁰ *Le Curé d'Ars*, by F. Trochu, p. 383.

and to perceive the devil disappear, all these were one and the same thing.¹¹

She mentions the case of other persons passing through the same "purgatory" but they did not give themselves entirely to Mary. "These," she says, "remain in this trial a long time, sometimes during their whole lifetime; some even lose their fervor."

Numerous cases could be cited of immediate succor given through the simple invocation of the name of Mary to souls tormented by the demon, cases which are in the domain of extraordinary mystical experiences. But these are not the object of our study.¹²

Trials are not only a means of purifying the soul in its advance toward greater love; much more, they are a proof of love. Hence they are encountered all along the way of predestined souls, and therefore also along the way of Marian souls.

Here again the Blessed Virgin fulfills her maternal role of consoling her children. But, if she consoles, does she not diminish the possibility of loving, since for these souls to suffer is to love? It is true that suffering is a proof of love, but that depends on the intention which we give to it. One may suffer as a rebel or one may suffer as a stoic. One may suffer as a Christian more or less interested in shortening his purgatory or in having a greater reward in heaven. One may suffer as a saint, out of pure love for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, without thought of personal interest, even of supernatural personal interest. It is precisely in this last way that Mary helps her privileged children to suffer, by showing them God's intentions in the trials which He sends, by directing them to unite their sufferings with those of Christ and their mother and to offer them for the extension of the reign of Christ, for the diffusion of devotion to Mary, etc.

Two years before her death, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus felt called to consecrate herself forever as victim to the merciful love of Jesus. From the moment of that consecration she observed that she was overwhelmed with special graces. But then also a very particular trial began to weigh upon her. Eternal life did not exist any more, "everything has disappeared," she writes. . . . It was during this period, in the month of July which preceded her death, that, feeling

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹² See particularly the biographies of Gemma Galgani and Josefa Menendez.

less ill, she said to the Sisters who surrounded her bed: "One would say that the little angels have passed the word to hide from me the light that showed me my approaching end."

"Have they hidden the Blessed Virgin also?"

"No, the Blessed Virgin will never be hidden from me, for I love her too much."¹³

Here is an extract from a letter of direction:

Rather frequently, of late, I have had the experience of sharing the agony of Jesus. I suffered so much at times that I did not hesitate to ask the Blessed Virgin for a little respite. Each time, I was heard almost instantaneously. Did I do wrong? When I made the request, I did it in conformity with the will of Almighty God. May I do it again in the future if the occasion arises?

To Josefa Menendez, Mary brought the crown of thorns as token of the predilection of her Son. "Look," she said, "it is I who bring it to thee, that it be sweeter." "Mary herself pressed it on my head," Josefa wrote.¹⁴

Josefa spoke to the Blessed Virgin:

O my Mother, why are these temptations so strong? . . . You see how much I suffer. . . .

It is fitting that you suffer, Josefa. Jesus wants it so. Tell your Mother Superior that one of the souls He confided to you has given itself entirely to Him; your sufferings have won over this soul. Now you must still suffer for the others, which will cost you very much. But love and suffering can obtain all. . . . Do not weaken; it is for these souls.¹⁵

Allow me finally to cite a personal experience in order to acquit myself of an old debt of gratitude. One of my novices, Joseph Leute, a very generous soul, Marian through and through, suffered dreadfully from a hidden disease which was to take him a few months after his religious profession in 1916. I asked Joseph to offer some of his sufferings for the success of my Marian apostolate, especially my future writings on the Blessed Virgin. He thanked me effusively.

Sometime later I saw him tortured by his relendess malady. "Are

¹³ *Novissima verba*, p. 54.

¹⁴ *Un appel à l'amour. Le Message du Coeur de Jésus au monde, et sa messagère, Soeur Josefa Menendez*, p. 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

you suffering much, Joseph?" I said. "Oh, Father," he replied, and his countenance brightened with a beautiful smile, "I am happy to suffer for the Blessed Virgin."

It seems to me that one can apply especially to Marian souls the word of St. Augustine: "Whoever loves, does not suffer; or, if he suffers, he loves what he suffers."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mystical Union With Mary and Transformation Into Jesus

Authors who treat of mystical graces speak of a *transforming union into God*, which in its beginning is called spiritual espousals, and in its consummation, spiritual marriage. One of its characteristics is an intellectual view of the most Holy Trinity, which gradually becomes constant in spiritual marriage; another is the soul's awareness of participating, by acts of mind, love, and will, in the analogous acts of God.¹

Authors do not agree entirely on the meaning of these terms. And since there is question of extraordinary mystical graces, we shall not concern ourselves with them here. There is no question of spiritual espousals or marriage in the life of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, and no doubt she, whom Pope Pius XI called the greatest saint of modern times, reached a degree of union with God, at least as high as others who were favored with the whole gamut of mystical graces.

What everyone should strive for is the fullest possible participation in the life of Jesus, so as to be able to say with St. Paul: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me." According to the same Apostle: "Those whom he has foreknown he has also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren."² This program supposes, as we have already explained, that we arrive at thinking, feeling, willing, and acting as Jesus did, so that our life be entirely transformed into His.

In Part I we saw how Mary communicates the dispositions of Jesus to those who enjoy ordinary union with her. Especially in prayer, she helps make their spiritual work Christocentric. It is evident that

SThe Graces of Interior Prayer, by A. Poulain, S.J., Herder, Chapter XIX.
2 Rom. 8:29.

she will do this with even greater perfection to those for whom she has obtained the gift of her presence. These especially does she *will* to transform entirely into Jesus and she *is able* to do it.

She *wills* so to transform them because she herself lives only for Jesus and by Jesus, and her greatest desire is to make Him live as fully as possible in all her children. Marian souls, in whom she acts more freely than in others, are more fit to become other Christs. She wills this also because it is her mission from God to give the life of Jesus to all other children, to each one according to his capacity, and this capacity is greater in Marian souls.

And she *can* do so, because her soul has become, as it were, their soul. They realize that it is their heavenly mother who loves Jesus in them, who praises Jesus, reproduces Jesus, wills to extend the reign of Jesus; and they are very happy to sense Mary in them loving Jesus and causing pleasure to Jesus.

The soul of Mary, as we have said, is a "pure capacity for Jesus."³ Jesus, apart from His divine hypostasis, passed entirely into her.⁴⁵ He passed also into the other saints, but in them his traits have been more or less deformed or warped by reason of original sin. In Mary, there is no deformation; Jesus is there intact. If the soul of Jesus passed into Mary, and if the soul of Mary passed into her children of predilection, these children will also be possessed entirely by Jesus.

Such is the doctrine and the experience of Marian souls. To Father Chevaux, one of his most faithful disciples, the saintly Father Chaminade wrote:

At times you have entered into the heart of your tender mother. Have you ever found there any interests other than those of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, her adorable Son, her First-born, our elder Brother? The ardent love which Mary bears us is entirely relative to our conformity with this First-born; and her ambition — if we may use this term in regard to the holiest of creatures — all her ambition is that all the children whom her charity has engendered after Him, be so united to Him as to make only one same Son, one same Jesus Christ.[®]

³ Cardinal Bertille.

* That is, all the dispositions of the soul of Jesus have passed into the soul of Mary, have become dispositions of her soul (*Translator*).

⁵ S.F., I, par. 440; see also I, par 112. "Whatever is carried in the womb of Mary can be only Jesus Christ Himself, or can live but the life of Jesus Christ. . .

A militant adherent of Catholic Action, known for her devotion to Mary, wrote:

On the vigil of the feast of Corpus Christi, my confessor said to me: "Although you love above all to consider Mary, during this octave apply yourself to consider Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."

I replied: "O Father, I always contemplate Jesus more than I do Mary, because Mary makes me contemplate Him."

We have already cited Brother Leonard who was remarkable for his life of union with Mary. Reading the chapter on his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, one would say that there was no more room in his life for Christ and for the most Holy Trinity. Indeed, he exclaims:

Mary is my Mother and I am her child. Her picture is always within my reach, and for me, her picture is herself. Hence I have a conversation with her every moment.⁶

This statement must be taken literally, for at every moment he would turn his glance toward the picture of the Blessed Virgin and converse with her in all simplicity and naïveté, as a child with its mother. Yet to one of his correspondents he penned these words:

Always more to her, always more to her . . . in order to belong entirely to Jesus, to Jesus!

In fact, in the next chapter, on his relations with our Lord, we find the following:

Devotion to Mary is not all of our holy religion. All our religion is Jesus. . . . But whoever gives himself to Mary is led by her to her Son. . . .⁷

With Jesus, I will live my Marian life. I will afford the Son the delightful joy here on earth to love His beloved mother again, through me and in me; I will give to the mother the joy of seeing her Son relive in me. What a sweet thought!⁸

Thus, if the Marian soul endeavors to be constantly faithful to grace, it becomes little by little entirely Mary and entirely Jesus, entirely Jesus because entirely Mary.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 320.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 326.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mystical Union With Mary and the Most Blessed Trinity

Chapter Thirty-Six of Part I showed how Mary conducts the soul from the cold cult of the most Holy Trinity to a living, vivifying devotion to the three divine Persons. We saw how the contemplation of Mary's attitude toward the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by a psychological sympathy aided by grace, makes the dispositions of veneration, tenderness, and confidence of Mary's heart pass over into our own.

For the soul favored with the gift of the presence of Mary, a new, powerful factor is added to this first, namely, the *consciousness* of Mary's action in the soul which makes it *sense* that veneration, that tenderness, and that confidence of the Heart of Mary. Because it loves Jesus with the Heart of Mary, with that Heart also it addresses the Father and the Holy Spirit; Mary, so to say, speaks to the Father, confides in the Father, prays to the Father, loves the Father, glorifies the Father; Mary contemplates, prays to, loves, and honors the Holy Spirit. The soul senses that it is all love through its identification with its Mother. Let us go back to Chapter Forty-One and review the different circumstances of the life of the Blessed Virgin which inflamed her filial piety to the heavenly Father and her affection for the Holy Spirit, in order to feel in our heart what the Heart of Mary felt.

On the other hand, following a remark made before, mystical union with Mary presupposes mystical union with Jesus. When the soul unites to Mary to contemplate with her eyes the Father and the Holy Spirit, and with her heart to love them, it unites itself naturally also to Jesus—for, in practice, the one always calls for the other—and Jesus also communicates to the soul His dispositions toward the

Father and the Holy Spirit. Then we understand how, by that double union, by that double quasi identification with Jesus and Mary, our devotion to the most Holy Trinity becomes more intimate and more necessary. It is a fact that many pious souls, even those devoted to Mary, do not go beyond the *cult* of the most Holy Trinity and never reach—or arrive late at—a living devotion to It. Mystical Marian souls, on the contrary, experience all the attraction of this mystery, certain among them almost from the moment of their supernatural union with Mary, others later no doubt, but in any case, faster than souls not favored with this gift.

It is also a fact of experience that, in mystical Marian souls, union with Mary increases in the same proportion as union with the Trinity. Indeed we must not believe that Mary, being the way which has led these souls to the threshold of the holy of holies, now retires to let them enter all alone. No matter how advanced a soul is, it must grow unceasingly in perfection and therefore needs unceasingly the help of the Dispensatrix of all graces; at this height, less than ever, can it do without its heavenly Mother. Above all, Mary also, by a right incomparably more sacred than that of all other mystical souls, enters into this holy of holies.

Let us consider first the saintly soul who is known universally and supereminently as the adoratrix of God in three persons, the young Carmelite of Dijon, Elizabeth of the Trinity. Her vocation was to live and to teach the interior life in intimacy with the Divinity. The mystery of the most Holy Trinity attracted her early in life.

Elizabeth always had a great devotion to Mary. After her entrance into Carmel, this devotion turned especially toward the contemplation and imitation of the interior life of the Blessed Virgin, especially in the Incarnation, which is the manifestation in Mary of the mystery of the Trinity.

She wrote to one of her correspondents: "During this month of May, I will be entirely united to you in the soul of the Blessed Virgin; there we will adore the Holy Trinity."¹ To the same person, speaking of the transformation of the soul into the three divine Persons and of her "vocation to live in this sacred brightness," she confesses: "I should like to respond to this grace by living on earth like the Blessed Virgin, keeping all things in my heart, burying myself so to speak

¹ *Ecrits spirituels d'Elizabeth de la Trinité*, by P. Philippon, p. 102.

at the bottom of my soul so as to lose myself in the Trinity which remains there to transform me into Itself. Then my motto, my 'luminous ideal' will be realized: I shall indeed be Elizabeth of the Trinity."²³

It was on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, which recalled the resolution of the Blessed Virgin to pass her life in intimacy with God, that she wrote her sublime "elevation to the Trinity": "O my God, Trinity that I adore . . ."

She does not cease contemplating and admiring the Virgin of the Incarnation in her relations with the most Holy Trinity, so as to identify herself more and more with Mary. In her "spiritual testament" she speaks of this with touching admiration.²⁴ In her last retreat, before the meditation on her passing into the bosom of the tranquil Trinity, she places a meditation on the *Jantta caeli* (Mary, gate of heaven), where again she describes with enthusiasm that "creature who also was (after Jesus) the great praise of the Holy Trinity; who responded fully to the divine election of which the Apostle speaks; who was always pure, immaculate, irrépréhensible in the eyes of the thrice holy God."²⁴

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus had a different mission from that of her Sister of Dijon; it was to preach her "little way," that is, the virtues of spiritual childhood. But if she spoke less of the Holy Trinity, she still had a great devotion to this mystery. It was to the most Holy Trinity, on the feast of the Holy Trinity, that she made her act of offering as a victim, a holocaust to the merciful love of almighty God. Now it was to Mary that she confided this offering and through Mary that she presented it to the Holy Trinity: "I offer You all the merits of the saints in heaven and on earth, their acts of love and those of the angels; finally I offer You, O most Blessed Trinity, the love and the merits of the Blessed Virgin, my beloved Mother; to her I abandon my offering, begging her to present it to You."²⁵

Here is the testimony of two religious, one a priest, the other a teaching Brother. The former is Father Gabriel Jacquier, whom we have already met. He writes:

Mary will lead us to profound union with the Holy Trinity if we

² *Ibid.*, p. 185.

* *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁵ *Histoire d'une âme*, p. 305.

are docile to her maternal inspirations, if we give ourselves, abandon ourselves, without any preconceived idea and especially without wishing consciously to analyze this union. The child, in the womb of his mother, is unconscious; and so from the supernatural point of view we are here below in "great darkness" *in sinu Mariae*."

The second is Brother Leonard, of the Christian Brothers. The very title of his biography, "From Mary to the Trinity," gives notice of the close relationship he saw between union with Mary and union with the three divine Persons. The object of his spiritual work during the last months of his life was as follows: "Without multiplying words, to live habitually with my gaze fixed on Mary, on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."⁷ From his cell, which he baptized "Solitude of Our Lady of Grace," he said:

How large a little room is, when one lives there with thee, O Mary, daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, Temple of the Holy Ghost, and as such, Universal Queen, surrounded by a numberless court.⁸

A person of the world comments:

In my soul I sense Mary in her spirit of thanksgiving. Without ceasing I thank the most Holy Trinity for what it has done for Mary: the Father for having created her for His Son; the Son for having accepted her as His mother; the Holy Ghost for having taken her for spouse. . . .

In saying: "In the name of the Father . . ." I must use deliberation with veneration. It is Mary who salutes the Holy Trinity through me. . . .

In occupying myself with exterior things, paying attention to conversations, I remain interiorly close to Mary and to the most Holy Trinity.

Evidently Marian souls, favored with extraordinary mystic graces, profess the same devotion to the Holy Trinity.⁹ Let us cite only that recommendation of our Lord to one of them, Sister Mary of the Trinity, Poor Clare of Jerusalem (1901-1942), who summarizes the

⁸ *Vie Mariale*, p. 38.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 391.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁹ See Consummata, Mary of the Trinity; Mother St. Cecilia of Rome; Mother Angela Sorazu, etc.

experiences of ordinary and extraordinary mystic union: "Never present yourself alone to the Holy Trinity, but always with Me, so that I can pray in thee, and with my Mother. We have adopted thee, and thou hast given Me thy humanity. I wish to live again in thee."¹⁰

¹⁰ *Vie*, Beyrouth, p. 215. A passage of Mary of St. Theresa seems to contradict this conclusion. She had received through Mary the grace of renewing her nuptial union with Jesus. Noticing that since the time of this favor, the presence of Mary became rarer, she received this interior response: "When the amiable Mother was constantly close to thee and guided thee in the way of her virtues, it was to prepare thee for the spiritual marriage with her very dear Son. Now that this marriage has been accomplished, she stays aside and lets the Spouse converse alone with the beloved, as is proper" (p. 96).

I do not believe, however, that there is any real contradiction between the two statements. Previously the solitary often saw Mary united to the divinity as making only one object of contemplation with it; now she sees only Jesus as object of contemplation. In the experiences of the other mystics which I have cited, there is no question of *Mary* as object of contemplation, but as subject contemplating with the soul.

Whether this is an explanation or not, it is certain from theology, which teaches us that all graces come to us through Mary, and from the almost unanimous testimony of mystic souls, that in all the degrees of ascension toward God, the soul feels the need of, and is conscious of, the help of Mary.

Besides, it is a matter that interests mainly the student of extraordinary mystical phenomena; this last does not form the object of our inquiry.

CHAPTER NINE

Eternal Union With Mary

For every Marian soul union with Mary, no matter how close it be, is only a preparation for another union, which surpasses in felicity, intimacy, and duration every kind of union here below, namely, the union in heaven.

The Marian soul looks forward to this union with infallible hope. It knows, by the unanimous voice of all generations, and no less surely by the voice of its own heart, that the child of Mary shall never perish.

When the moment of death approaches, it counts on Mary to ease the passage into the unknown beyond the grave.

She consoles some of her children by coming to lead them to the Father. All have the conviction that, though they are sinners, their Mother will obtain for them at least a curtailment of their purgatory.

If they clearly understand their particular motives of confidence, may they not hope to pass directly into heaven as did the child of Mary, Teresa of the Child Jesus? In her act of offering as victim and holocaust to the love of God she asked Him "that her soul take its flight without delay to the eternal embrace of His merciful love."

A person might object: "Of course, that holds for those who know that they are as pure as this saint whom a Pope proclaimed the greatest saint of modern times." St. Teresa, however, nowhere bases her confidence upon the consciousness of her constant fidelity to God. She speaks formally: "Ah, I know it! Even if I had upon my conscience all the crimes that could be committed, I would lose none of my confidence; with a heart broken by repentance I would go and cast myself into the arms of my Saviour. I know that He loves the prodigal child; I heard His words to Mary Magdalen, to the adulterous woman, to the Samaritan. No! No one will be able to

frighten me for I know how to rely on His love and His mercy. I know that the whole multitude of sins would crumble and vanish in the twinkling of an eye, as a drop of water cast into a burning furnace.”¹

St. Teresa held to that thought and spread it around her, as the “Souvenirs” of her sister Celine show.² A scruple of humility seems to forbid such an ambition. Still, if it had been contrary to humility, little Teresa, who delighted in her nothingness, would certainly have banished it.³ But she had a better understanding of such things.

Sufficient confidence in the infinite mercy of Jesus to hope to pass directly into heaven procures more glory and more joy to Him and to Mary, and more good to the soul and to the Church, than a more or less prolonged sojourn in purgatory. An unshakable faith in the infinite mercy of Jesus, because it is infinitely greater than our misery ever could be, evidently honors His goodness much more than the attitude of the one who does not dare expect such a favor. It also does more honor to the goodness of Mary, who herself inspires such a thought in her child. Besides it satisfies the love of Jesus and of Mary because love tends to union, and the love of Jesus and that of His Mother desire union with the faithful soul more than the soul itself desires union with them. Finally, this heroic confidence procures more advantage to the soul and to the whole Church than the sojourn of that soul in purgatory, where it can merit nothing, either for itself — besides its purification — or for others. On the contrary, this act of unlimited confidence profits the Church in virtue of the Communion of Saints, at the same time as it obtains for the soul a greater felicity and a greater aptitude for loving God through all eternity.

To expect heaven immediately after death it should suffice to have the confidence of the good thief. Is it presumptuous for a soul who has endeavored to live constantly in the company of Mary, especially if it has felt in its interior life the constant action of its Mother whose soul has, so to say, passed into the soul of her child — is it rash for such a soul to hope to obtain through her at the moment of death as

¹ *Autobiography*, Chap. X.

² *Conseils et Souvenirs*, pp. 43-47.

³ And Rome would not have indulged the recitation, by any sinner, of the act of offering with the words “that my soul may take its flight without delay. . . .”
Novissimo Verba, p. 204.

great a confidence as that of the thief whom she saw crucified at the side of her Son?

What will be the bliss of the Marian soul contemplating our Lord Jesus Christ and the most Blessed Trinity in union with its Mother? "The eye of man has not seen . . . We must be satisfied here on earth to rejoice in the prospect of that happiness. Souls especially united to Mary on earth may count upon a very special joy in heaven. Since heaven continues the relative perfection of our lives by perfecting them without measure, Marian souls may doubtlessly hope that, having endeavored to live with her in a very special union here below, in heaven they will be among those saints — all children of Mary — who will live an eternal life of very special intimacy with their Mother. And if, on earth, they labored to make her known, loved, and served, from heaven they will continue that apostolate, but on a much vaster scale, without measure, until the end of the world.

Extracts from the biographies of Marian souls describing their last moments will be enlightening here.

From the life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity:

In the last hours of her agony, they consoled her by recalling the presence of the well-beloved Virgin. "The Blessed Virgin will be there; she will hold out her hand to you."

"Yes, that's true: *Janua caeli* will let the *laudem gloriae* pass . . .

"The Blessed Virgin, that creature all luminous, all pure with the purity of God, will take me by the hand to introduce me into heaven, heaven so resplendent. . . .

"When I say my *Consummatum est*, it will be she again, the *Janua caeli*, who will introduce me into the divine sanctuary, whispering to me the mysterious words: *Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi; in domum Domini ibimus.*"

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus:

On July 8, 1897, when Teresa entered the infirmary, she wanted her Sisters to place "the smiling Virgin" close to her.

"Thou who didst come to smile upon the morning of my life,
Come to smile again, Mother, now that night is here."

During her last sickness, she did not cease speaking of the Blessed Virgin. "Very often I ask the Blessed Virgin to tell almighty God that He does not have to be easy on me."

"I have suffered much, very much, but I complained to the Blessed Virgin."

"My good Blessed Virgin, I would like to depart."

"Still I should like to have a beautiful death! I asked the Blessed Virgin for it. To ask the Blessed Virgin is not the same thing as asking almighty God. She knows well what she has to do with my little wishes, whether she should present them or not. . . ."

In the course of her agony, on the day of her death, they heard her murmur: "O my good Blessed Virgin, come, help me!" Then, toward three o'clock in the afternoon, she crossed her arms. The Mother Prior had placed a picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on her knees. Teresa let her eyes rest upon it: "O Mother, present me quickly to the Blessed Virgin, prepare me to die well."⁶

At six o'clock, when the Angelus rang, she lifted her suppliant eyes to the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

Toward seven o'clock, looking at the crucifix, she exclaimed: "Oh! . . . I love Him! . . . My God! . . . I . . . love . . . Thee. . ."

Called in haste, the Sisters came to kneel around her bed and were thus witnesses of her last moment of ecstasy.

The Saint's countenance had again taken on the lily tint, which it had in full health, her eyes were fixed on heaven, radiant and expressing *a jelicity which surpassed all hopes*. She made movements of the head as if someone had, several times, wounded her divinely with a dart of love.

Immediately after this ecstasy, which lasted for the space of a Credo, she closed her eyes and breathed her last.[®]

Brother Leonard:

On the last day of his life, toward noon, despite his extreme weakness, he raised himself, extended his arms as if to receive someone, and exclaimed looking upward: "*What a strange phenomenon! She is coming down, she is coming, she approaches, closer, closer!*"

Soon his eyes became filmy, the prayers for the dying were recited, and without the slightest movement, he took his flight to God.⁷

Let me close this section by recounting the last hours of Father Mougél, "Apostle of the Blessed Virgin and of the J.O.C."

⁶ *Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux*, Philipon, pp. 167–169.

⁶ *Novissima Verba*, p. 196 ff.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 402.

At eight o'clock in the evening the Superior recited the prayers for the dying. The sick priest listened attentively, joining in the invocations.

The rest of the time he passed in silence, conversing with Jesus and Mary in heaven, always perfectly conscious, responding with lucidity to all the questions put to him. His strength diminished visibly, but he said nothing of his sufferings. From time to time, he gazed at the statue of the Blessed Virgin on the table beside his bed. There was an alarm clock close by, as though to sound the hour of departure. Frequently he asked for medicine to sustain him until after midnight.

"His breathing became more and more difficult," related his father. "A little after midnight (at 12:05, according to the nurse) he yielded his soul to God without a word of weariness or complaint.

"The Blessed Virgin came to welcome him no doubt, for the smile he bore upon his lips indicated that someone supernatural was near him. As for us who closed his eyes, we weep because he is no longer here. On the other hand, we are happy to know that he is just as happy himself in heaven."

It was the last Saturday in the month of the Blessed Virgin, the last day of the novena made to Mary for him, the feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. She had chosen the hour well to come for her child of predilection.⁸

Beati mortui qui in Domino — et in Domina — moriuntur!

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

CHAPTER TEN

Frequency of the Gift of the Presence of Mary

Previously we cited the word of Father Chaminade who said that the gift of the presence of Mary was rare. Before him St. Louis Mary de Montfort had remarked that a small number of those who read his treatise would take generously to the interior practice of this devotion. But generosity is an indispensable condition for meriting the gift of the presence of Mary.¹

Let us see first of all what history teaches in regard to the frequency of this gift.² St. Ildephonsus of Toledo (seventh century) speaks of a very affectionate union with the Blessed Virgin, which permits us to suppose that he experienced a mystical union with her. In his *Liber de virginitate perpetua Mariae*, he writes: "With what ardor I desire to become a servant of this Mistress, with what fidelity I rejoice in bearing the yoke of her service."³

At the same period and at the other extremity of Europe we find two celebrated Greek Fathers of the Church who give a still more precise impression of being favored with this gift. St. Germain of Constantinople (seventh and eighth centuries) addresses himself to Mary: "Just as during thy earthly life thou wert not a stranger to heavenly dwellings, so likewise after thy departure from this life thou wert not prevented from frequenting men in spirit. . . . For just as thou didst dwell in the flesh with those of past times, thus thou livest with us in spirit. The powerful protection with which thou coverest us is a sign of thy presence among us."⁴

St. John Damascene (eighth century) wrote: "Who is more gentle

¹ *Treatise*, No. 119. *Secret*, No. 52.

² There is no question here of a scientific inquiry, but of a rapid review. The former would be entirely useless to our purpose which is above all practical.

³ *P.L.* 96, c. 105.

⁴ *P.G.* 98, 343 CD.

than the Mother of God? She captivates my mind, she has enraptured my tongue. I picture her before me day and night.”⁵

These texts might explain an acquired union with Mary. However, a union so constant and so intimate can hardly be explained except by a mystic gift of the presence of Mary.

If St. Bernard (twelfth century) probably expressed a personal experience in saying: “May she not depart from our mind; may she not depart from our tongue,” we must suppose, too, that he had the same mystic intimacy with Mary. Without doubt we must make the same supposition about St. Gertrude, St. Mechtilde, St. Bridget, and others.

For the seventeenth century we possess more precise documents: Boudon, Olier, St. John Eudes, St. Louis Mary de Montfort, Mary of St. Theresa, and several others were souls united to the Blessed Virgin by entirely supernatural ties.

There must have been a certain number in the eighteenth century — we think naturally of St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Leonard of Port Maurice — but that period, contaminated partly by Jansenism, seems to have been less fertile than the preceding century.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century we have Father Chaminade speaking of the gift of the presence of Mary. He certainly possessed it and he must have known souls that had been favored by it; else he would not have mentioned it and would not have invited his disciples to merit it by great fidelity. A contemporary of Father Chaminade, Father Louis Mary Beaudoin, founder of the Sons of Mary Immaculate, had the same Marian grace, as is proved by the study of his spiritual doctrine.⁶

In the period which follows the definition of the Immaculate Conception, souls called to a very special union with the Mother of God were particularly numerous. Above all, it would seem to be true since the beginning of the twentieth century.

But we possess too little information to estimate the frequency of the gift of the presence of Mary. Extraordinary mystical graces are relatively easy to observe. Generally they manifest themselves exteriorly. But the consciousness of possessing the action of Mary in the soul's interior sanctuary escapes all exterior control. Neighbors will perhaps notice that they are in the presence of a pious soul,

⁵*P.G.* 96, 752 BCD.

⁶*Op. at.*, pp. 148-182.

devout to the Blessed Virgin, but will nowise suspect the special grace he has received. As for the person so privileged, he will naturally avoid revealing the divine secret for fear of losing it. It may even happen that such a person himself will not be aware that he is favored with a mystical grace, seeing that he lives in a similar intimacy with our Lord and nothing miraculous ever appeared in his relations with his heavenly Mother. If I may be allowed to cite my personal experience, which is rather limited, I believe that there easily exist ten souls — perhaps I should say fifty — favored with the gift of the presence of Mary for everyone favored with authentic extraordinary mystical graces.

After all, whatever may be the frequency of this gift, the important thing is, according to Father Chaminade, St. Louis Mary de Montfort, and the experience of a considerable number of souls, that it is within the range of very generous persons who endeavor to be faithful to their grace and to all of their grace.

At the present time, the conditions of this fidelity are perhaps easier to realize than formerly. These are, as we have seen in Chapter Three, besides the total consecration of oneself, a Christocentric spirituality, a profound interior spirit, and an absolute confidence in Mary with efforts toward a constant union with her.

Whoever follows today's providential indications on devotion to the Eucharist, to Christ the King, to the Mystical Body of Christ, to the Christ of the Gospel, will quite naturally have a Christocentric spirituality.

Another providential indication is the enthusiastic cult of the whole Catholic universe for the young Carmelite St. Teresa of the Child Jesus. The attention of all devout souls has been called to her mission of making the world understand the importance of a life of humility and of evangelical simplicity.

Another Carmelite, Elizabeth of the Trinity, completes this mission by teaching the necessity of silence, exterior and especially interior, and of a life hidden with Christ in God.

And in this twentieth century God has given increasingly numerous and clear indications — very particularly by the definition of the dogma of the Assumption, by the proclamation of the Marian Year 1954, and the institution of the feast of the universal Queenship of Mary — that it is His will to have the faithful turn to their Mother with an

ever growing, fervent veneration of confidence, love, and devotedness.

It is evidently the desire of our Lord to see the greatest possible number of souls live in closest intimacy with His Mother. At a time when the powers of hell are unloosed and have organized a desperate war, with such powerful and clever means, against religion and against the very idea of God, the Great Adversary of Satan must also appear in all her brightness in order to inflict a more humiliating defeat than ever before upon the ancient serpent. The more children she can unite closely to herself in this struggle, the more glorious will be her victory. There cannot then be question only of the individual fervor of Marian souls, but of the salvation of numberless souls. There is question of the triumph of our Mother, the Church, through the triumph of our Mother, the Virgin Immaculate. There is question of the very glory of the adorable Trinity.

May the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
be glorified in all places
through the Immaculate Virgin Mary!

Conclusion: Life of Union With Mary — Life of Union With Jesus

We have traversed the road which leads from ordinary devotion to the Blessed Virgin to life in union with her, a union which becomes ever more intimate and constant until it is practically uninterrupted. In pointing out the factors of this progress we clarified the relations between union with Mary and union with Jesus.

The intimacy between Jesus, our Model, and His mother invited us to form a similar intimacy between her and us.

For this purpose we applied ourselves to repeat frequently the name of Mary and naturally also that of Jesus.

The doctrine of the Mystical Body suggested that we love Mary with the Heart of Jesus, and Jesus with the heart of Mary.

The example of certain interior souls taught us in our relations to Jesus to communicate with Him through the soul of Mary, through her confidence, her humility, above all through her love, and in this way to enter into a completely loving and confident intimacy with Him.

Union with Mary demands our conformity with everything she wishes, with everything she desires. But since her wishes and desires coalesce with those of her Son, we are led to do generously whatever Jesus expects of us, which means giving Jesus, in the name of Mary, all the pleasure possible in whatever we do or suffer, and avoiding, at all costs, whatever could sadden Him, even the least fault.

In turn, union with Mary in our feelings brings us closer to Jesus. To restore our hearts in peace, our Mother recommends that we accept whatever Jesus wills or permits. In our sufferings she consoles us by having us unite those sufferings with His according to His intentions, for the salvation of souls.

In union with Mary in our spiritual exercises, we saw how she

teaches us to pray to Jesus with greater recollection, familiarity, confidence, and love.

Especially in devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, in devotion to the Body of Christ, which is the flesh of Mary, the Blessed Virgin makes us love Jesus more, makes us live His life better, because "He who eats of Me will live by Me." In Holy Communion she makes us become *hosts*, victims with Jesus, the great Victim. She has us make reparation with a suffering love like hers which is the love of the great Reparatrix for all the outrages with which His Sacred Heart is flooded in His sacrament of love.

Mary offers the same help in our spiritual work, which consists in identifying us with Christ. She teaches Jesus to us: she makes us understand how to take on all His dispositions, how to transform ourselves into Him until we can say, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

Mary, model of the life of faith and hope, has us participate with her unshakable faith and with her unlimited confidence in the teachings and in the goodness of her Son, but above all, in her love for Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

She communicates to us also her love for men, the brothers of Jesus, her children in Jesus. Coredemptrix, charged with a universal, apostolic mission until the end of time, she expects support from us in that mission, so that with her we devote and sacrifice ourselves for the souls for whom Jesus died, in order to lead them all back to Him and to the Father.

The confidences of certain interior souls have taught us that, besides a mystical union with our Lord, there is a mystical union with His Mother. This union appears to be closely related to the mystical union with Jesus, a sort of *conscious* participation in the dispositions of Mary toward her Son, and, in consequence, a very efficacious means of tying together all the threads of love between our souls and Christ.

Thus, in seeking to intensify our union with Mary, we perceive that we have intensified, perhaps even more, our union with Jesus. If, to advance our union with the Son as much as possible we had abandoned union with the Mother under the pretext of giving all our time and efforts to union with Jesus, we would have made less progress in intimacy with Him than we have made by application

to union with Mary. We would have understood less the interior of Jesus in our studies and personal reflections than we understand it under Mary's direction. We could not have reached that intimacy with Him, that combination of confidence, abandonment, humility, familiarity, and, above all, love, to which Mary introduced us so that, after giving her everything, we could share her dispositions toward her Son, and become Mary for Jesus and Jesus for Mary. The experience of interior souls proves this point.

Moreover, long ago, St. Pius X, under the double inspiration of his own experience and of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed that fact to the world. On becoming Sovereign Pontiff in 1903, he declared that his program was "to restore all things in Christ." Then on February 2, 1904, he published an encyclical on the Blessed Virgin, because he saw in Mary the providential means of leading the world to Christ. "Nobody in the world," he said, "has known Jesus as she has; nobody is a better teacher and better guide to teach Jesus. From this it follows . . . that neither is anybody equal to her in uniting men in Jesus." It will always be true that, like His first adorers, the shepherds and the magi, we shall find the Child with Mary His Mother.

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